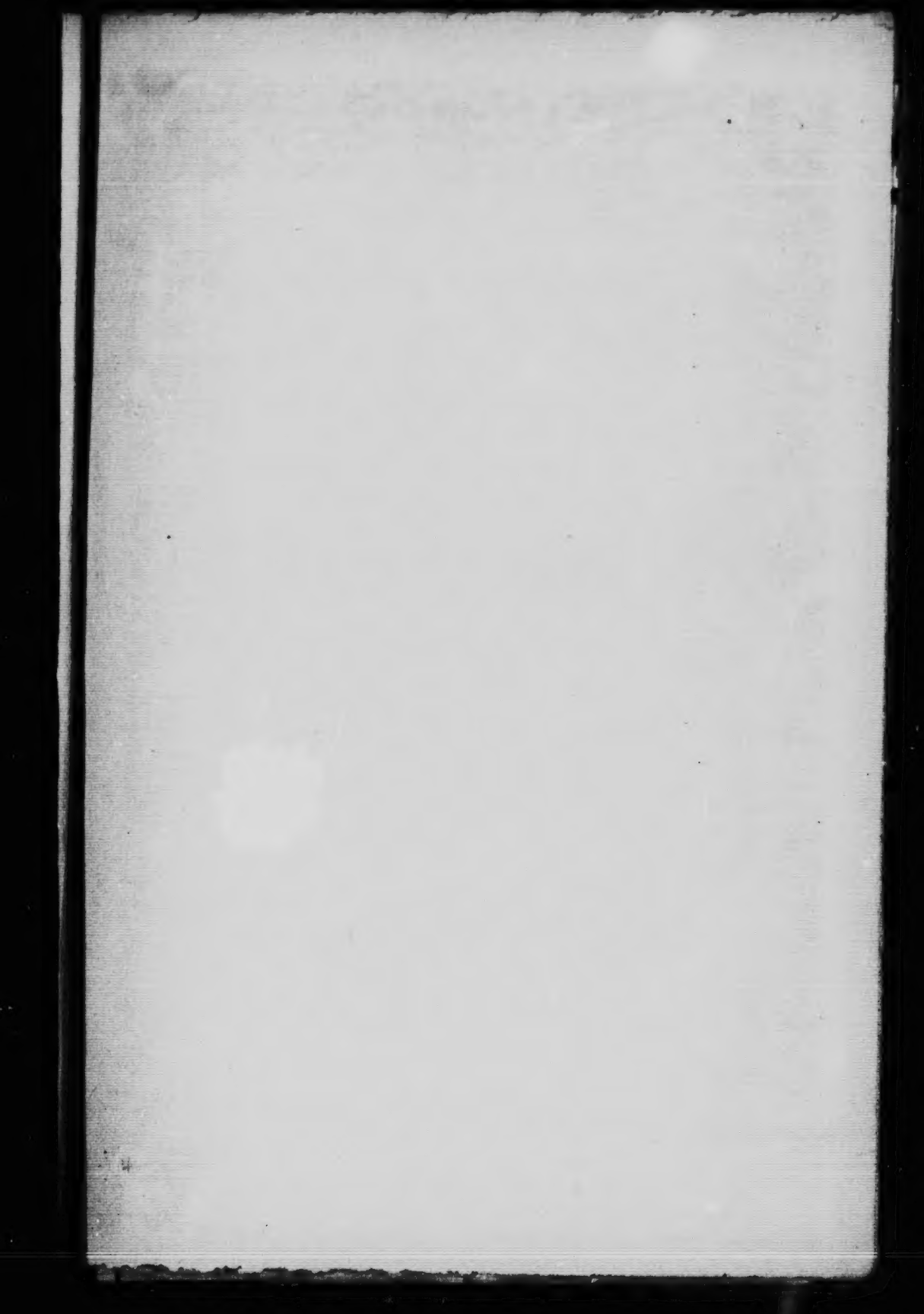
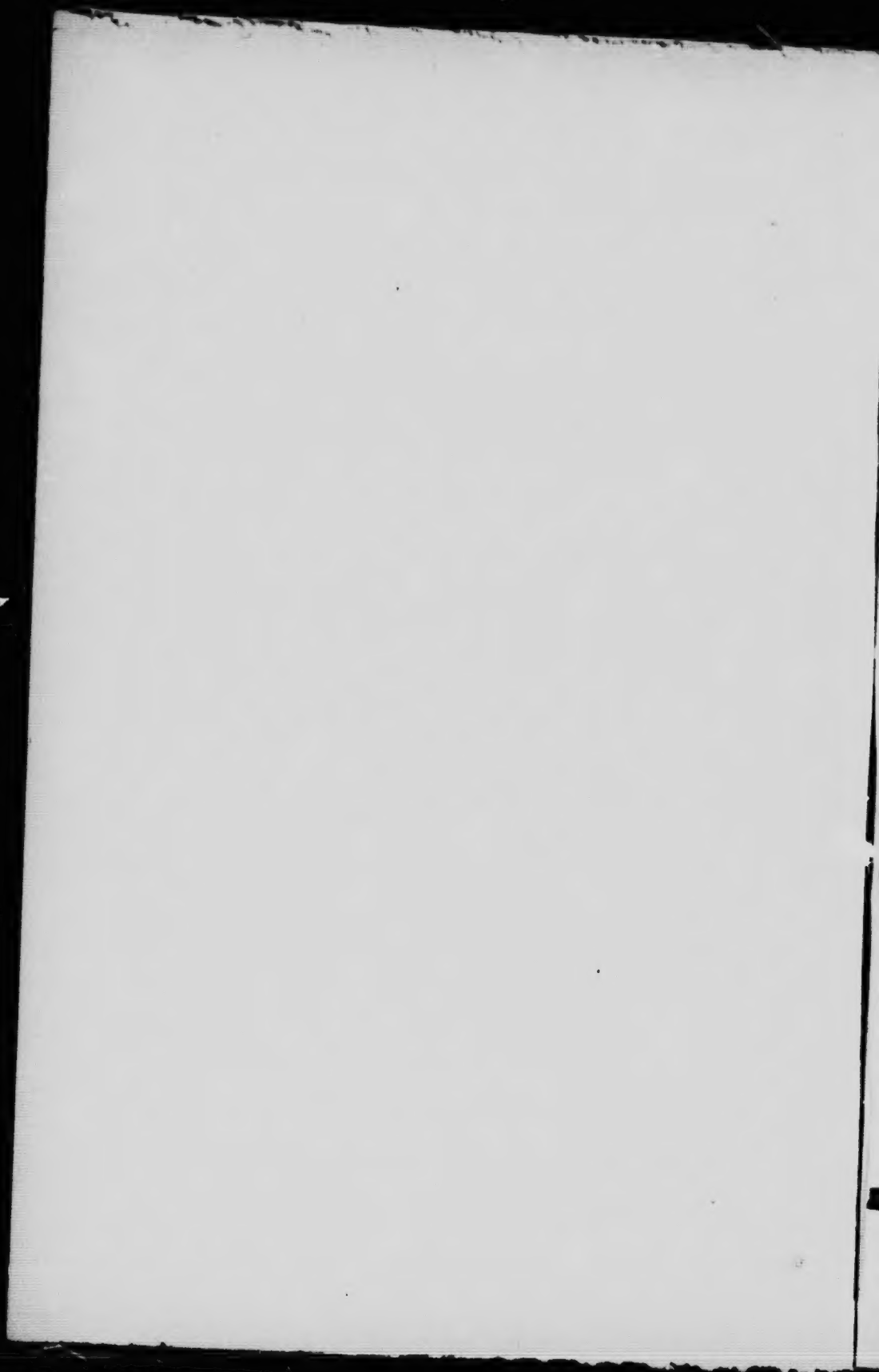
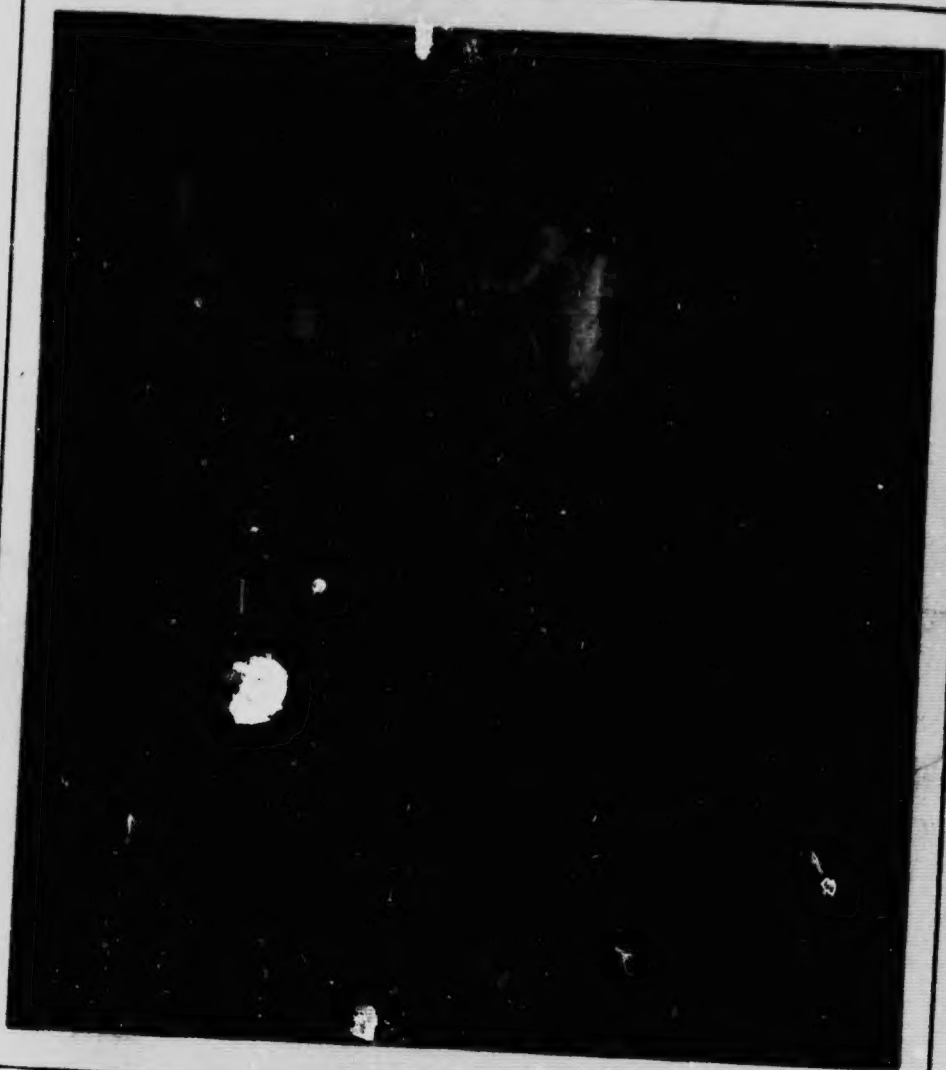






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CRACKS WI' ROBBIE DOO

BY

JOSEPH LAING WAUGH

AUTHOR OF

"ROBBIE DOO" "THORNHILL AND ITS WORTHIES"
"A LITTLE CHILD SMALL LEAD THEM" ETC.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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I DEDICATE THIS BOOK WITH MANY
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TO

JACKSON MILLAR, ESQ.,
DEREEL, AYR

CHAPTER I

I THINK I'm safe in sayin' that, amang the aulder portions o' oor village community, there's nae man has keepet closer in touch wi' the young folk o' later generations than I mysel' hae dune.

When I was gettin' on in years, turnin' grey, and feelin' the burden o' the day mair than I aince did, it cam' to me that surely yin o' the ways—in fact, I micht say the only way—o' keepin' young is to mix freely wi' younger minds than your ain. By keepin' young I dinna mean continuin' to be thochtless and irresponsible—thochtless as to the value and importance o' time, and the necessity o' layin' up store in youth for the wants o' age, and irresponsible in as far as the need o' recognising the realities o' life is concerned, and, what is not only expected, but demanded o' a full, matured manhood. No! No! I dinna mean

that. Increasin' years bring wi' them a settled-doon kind o' feelin', a dignity, as it were, a mellowin' o' disposition, and a certain solidifyin' o' character which is the ootcome and result o' Life's varied experiences, and which naturally preclude ony possibility o' onything in the form o' carelessness or flippancy.

But there's a buoyancy in youth—a hopefulness, an ambition which makes it worth strivin' to maintain, and which, when tacked on, as it were, to auld age—as it surely *can* be—gies the winter o' life an occasional blink o' the summer sun o' youth, and detracts nothing whatever frae the nobility and sacredness o' the wrinkled broo and the silvered hair o' threescore years and ten.

The Hopefulness o' Youth! What a valuable asset to hae when the grasshopper becomes a burden and when the grinders are few. Hope! Ay, it's the ettler o' youth, and the solace o' age: lose it, and the first's a failure and the last a burden.

Weel, in the laudable desire to possess this virtue, and at the same time yieldin' to a natural inclination to gie, in advice, the result

o' my life's experience, I hae come into close personal touch wi' mony sons o' the village wha hae brocht to it credit and renown, and it is my proud boast that the acquaintanceship commenced between us in these early days, in every case amaiist, continues unbroken to the present time.

There was a book published some three years ago by a Doctor o' Diveenity o' the Auld Kirk o' Scotland, which is considered by authorities to be the last word on the subject o' the Scottish Covenanters. And the author o' this great work, as a boy, was the best shoogie-shooper that ever spieled my yaird dyke. He never comes doon to Thornhill but he pays me a veesit, and I can ca' him "Jeems" wi' as muckle freedom the day as I did when he sat straddle-legg'd across my ten-inch plank.

Ay, and before the great explorer Joseph Thomson left for Africa, he missed a train, so that he micht shake hauns guid-bye wi' me, and when he cam' back ladened wi' honours, the first hoose in Thornhill he veesited was mine, and he brocht, as a present to me, an outfit o' blackamoor's claes, that ony eident

Thornhill tailor could mak' in five-and-twenty
moonites.

And there's anither, a Moderator o' the Auld Kirk o' Scotland, wha, as a boy, ploitered diligently amang my time, and built hooses wi' my sand, and when I see his name flourishin' in the daily papers I often wonder if he minds o' chummin' Sam'l Morraime in screwin' on the water-tap o' the main pipe at the heid o' the auld toon. Ay, and when he saw the street flooded frae siver to siver, and when Peter Clerk, the policeman, was somebody to be reckoned wi', was it his mother he flew to in his 'oor o' peril? No, it was to Robert Doo, whase freen' he was then, and whase freen' he is still.

And dod, man, when I used to gang up to Robert Tamson's smiddy to get my chisels sherpened, there was a gleg-faced, blue-e'd son o' the smith's wha used to convoy me to the fit o' the back road, deavin' me a' the way wi' questions aboot my early curlin' days, when "the Duke" and Jeems Cook and Jeems Tait were names to conjure by. He used to split Grizzly's sticks and gang her errants, and

noo, man, to-day he has "Professor" in front o' his name, and he's the Principal o' a College away in Africa. He's barely thirty-three, and his faither, honest man, still ca's him "Rab."

Prood o' thae young men! I should juist think I am, and the village is prood o' them tae. Nane o' them were presented wi' a travellin'-bag or a silver-mounted umbrella when they left their hames, and their picters are no' painted in oil and hingin' on the walls o' oor Masons' Hall, but their deeds are remembered, and their names cut deep in the hert o' every native o' oor toun. Ay, man, they never come to my door but they're welcome, and they never leave my fireside but I feel the better o' their veesit.

But there's anither son o' the village I want to tell ye aboot, yin wha, tho' he never, as it were, kicket up ony stramash among books or carved for himsel' a niche in the temple o' fame, endeared himse' to me as nae fremit laddie had ever dune before, or has ever dune sin' syne. Dod, I loved that boy as I did my ain, and my exper'ance in this was a revelation

to me, as I didna think it possible that ony yin, no' a drap's bluid related, could tak' sic a grip o' yin's very hert-strings.

Robert Fairley was his name, and he cr m' to Thornhill a laddie of three or maybe fower years auld to be brocht up wi' his uncle, Dauvid Morrison, the grocer, wha for mony a year lived next door to me but yin, and wha, I may say, was yin o' the best and kindest neighbours that mortal man could desire.

He was a great reader was Dauvid, and a deep, serious thinker. O' books he had galore, and a' on subjects on which I had nae knowledge, and in which I had neither interest nor concern. His kindness o' hert was proverbial, and what he did for the puir, in a quiet way, will be remembered when *his* ledger o' life is squared. I say nocht aboot his views on religion. A' the time I kenned him he never entered a kirk door, binna aince, and it was when Joseph Thomson lectured on Africa in the Auld Kirk o' Morton, but tak' it frae me, wha kenned him weel there was mair reverence for a Great Supreme Being and mair o' the milk o' human kindness in Dauvid Morrison's

hert than there was, or is, in the hale Presbytery o' Carronbrig.

Early in life he had mairret Mary Ann Hamilton, a dochter o' Hamilton o' Langford, and a kind, weel-daein' wife she made him. They had nae weans, but her hauns were aye fu' enough, for an aulder unmairret brither o' Dauvid's, Ebenezer, or "Uncle Eb," as he was ca'd, retired wi' a considerable fortune frae the Scotch drapery trade and took up his abode wi' them, and for lang the three o' them lived happily and contentedly till Mary Ann contracted a tumour and died. Dauvid's younger sister had mairret an engineer in Glesca, yin Paul Fairley, and she, havin' been early left a widow wi' ae wean, Robert, and no' carin' greatly for a toon's life, was as glad to come as Dauvid was anxious to have her, as his hoosekeeper.

Weel, she brocht the wee man wi' her, of coorse, and I really think he was yin o' the best-faured, best-formed, and manliest wee laddies I ever clappit an e'e on. In due time he gaed thro' the Gill to the schule, and it was no time till he was as great a favourite wi'

the maister and the boys as he was at hame and wi' me. His lessons were nae bother or worry to him, and after schule 'oors, when he had them a' by hert, he wad come in next door to Grizzy, or, if I was busy hewin' in the yaird, he wad find his way to me and, wi' a wee bit rag o' an auld apron in front o' him, and a chisel and mell in his haun, he wad chip at a bit o' Gatelawbridge sandstane till his wee arms were tired.

I used to tell him he wad, some day, be a great sculptor, but I kenned frae the maister he was far ower nacky at figures for his inclination to lead him into siccan a groove.

His Uncle Dauvid, between his business and his books, had little odd time to devote to the wee man, but he was as kindly and thochtfu' otherwise as ony uncle could be. Uncle Eb was ower thrang addin' to his already big store o' bawbees to heed him much. He gaed in for poultry, and a guid-layin' hen or a thrivin' pullet was o' mair importance in Eb's een than a' the curly-heided wee laddies that ever ca'd a gird.

What an auld skinflint Uncle Eb was, to be

sure! Man, he rarely spent a penny. He lived mainly on porridge and buttermilk, his claes were green wi' age and speckled wi' patches, and he wore an auld pair o' Militia buits which he must hae bocht second-haun or stolen frae some needy sodger, for he was aye ower busy servin' himsel' to serve his country.

Hens—guid-layin' yins—were his gods, or rather I should say his goddesses, and it was perfectly pathetic to watch him dodgin' aboot, wi' his rounded shoulders and his bowlie legs, on the trail o' a hen which he judged was minded to lay away and cheat him oot o' the reward o' his feedin'. Dod, d'ye ken, sae muckle time did he spend wi' his hens, and sae engrossed was he wi' them that he got to hae the look o' an auld clocker, and if he had started some fine day to "cluck, cluck" and scrape sand wi' his turned-in taes, the deevil a body wad hae been a bit surprised.

It's an auld sayin' that a boy's best friend is his mother, and, faith, it's a true yin. The love that Mrs. Fairley spent on that wee laddie was remarkable. It glinted frae her e'e every

time she looked at him, and it was reciprocated in a way that was positively touchin'. On his pairt there was nae gush or sloppiness, but a gallantry and an air o' lovin' protectership which, to me, aye smacked mair o' the lover than the son. Next to his mither I'm sure he loved Grizzy and me best. Oor hoose was a second hame to him, and his frequent veesits were never ill-timed or unwelcome. Grizzy had tell't him aboot the gird that hangs beside the eicht-day clock, and whase wee hauns had put it there. I ken fu' weel that a gird has a great fascination for a laddie, and tho' he often sat and looked longin'ly at it, he never asked to tak' it doon. Grizzy often remarked to me aboot that, but she never hinted to me what she wad do if sic a request was ever made.

Weel, the years passed, and when Robert was oot o' the Standards he had developed a faculty for manipulatin' figures which fairly surprised the maister. Never had he kenned sic a weel-ordered, calculatin', reasonin' mind, never had he a scholar whase mental capacity was o' sic a highly developed order.

And what to mak' o' him was the question.

His mither had ambitions o' him bein' a minister, but Dauvid settled that by sayin' he was ower guid and clever a callant to be thrown away in sic a calling, and he suggested a stool in the office o' the Union Bank. Uncle Eb thoct he should tak' up the pack trade in Bristol, 'but the maister—to whom the maitter was referred—settled the question in his usual quiet, maisterfu' way, and when Robert was fifteen years auld he was occupyin' a desk in the office o' a stockbroker freen o' his in Glesca. Dod, man, the boy's progress, baith commercial and physical, was by-ordinar. When he was twenty-yin, he stood six feet two inches in his stockin' soles, broad shoodered, lang legged, and thin paunched—juist sic a strappin' lad as wad tak' the e'e o' the maist creetical leddy in the land. His office record was abune reproach, and he enjoyed the freenship o' the staff and the fullest confidence o' his employer. His foresicht and energy were at once recognised, and resulted in his bein' made a pairtner when he was barely twenty-five.

I mind fine the nicht he cam' doon to see

his mither aboot the money, which it seems stockbrokers hae to pay before they can, as it were, put their signboard abune their door. He had the necessary amount in his ain richt, left him by his faither, but his mither's sanction was necessary, and this, Uncle Eb strongly advised her to withhold. I dinna mind the exact sum—it micht be a thoosand, or it micht be twae—but it was in Eb's noddle that it was twae hunner pounds.

“Twae hunner pounds,” says he,—he had left nocht that belanged him in England, no' even his accent,—“twae hunner pounds! Michty me, that's a deevilish lot o' siller to pay for the richt to ca' your ain gird. It's no' easily made, and shouldna be lichtly pairted wi'. Twae hunner pounds! Let me see, that's—eh—ten twaes are twenty, ten times twae hunner is twae thoosan'—damn it, woman, that's twae thoosan' pullets at twae shillin's apiece, or, stop noo—let me think—a shillin' a dizzen is twae hunner and forty for a pound, and twae hunner and forty times twae hunner is—O Lord! it's four thoosan' dizzen. Eh, what wad that no' dae in a hen-run! I'll away

oot to the fresh air or I'll gang distracted," and he gaed away oot to the back gairden and left mither and son to complete the arrangement.

I had been ca'd in as a witness to some documents, and richt weel pleased was I, I tell ye, to see my young freen's feet sae steadily and surely planted on the ladder o' success. And dod, man, the best o' it was he never allo'ed his heid to get ower big for his hat. For a' the high position he held and the command o' siller he had, he was just as affable and put-up-able as he was when he was a boy at the schule, wi' a piece in his haun and a bag on his back. He had great pleesure in keepin' up acquaintance wi' a' his auld freens, and on his periodical veesits it was nice to see him takin' the horny, toil-stained haun o' Charlie Carr, the ditcher, in a grip as warm and herty as he gied his ain doatin' mither. And, mind you, not only was he the gentleman, but he looked the gentleman. His claes and buits were o' the very best, and he aye wore white shirts wi' stairched fronts and joined-on haun-hands—nae dickies

or cuffs for him, I tell ye. And the big seegaurs he smoked—eh, losh, what a lovely smell they had! Sometimes o' a mornin' he gaed doon and smoked yin, after his breakfast, at the bottom o' the gairden, ye ken, where his auld rabbit-hoose used to staun, and I used to daunner doon on my ain side o' the hedge and, unbeknown to him, sniff in the beautiful fragrance o' his fine Manila.

He often gied me a handfu', and I smoked them wi' a relish and enjoyment, but they never smelled to me the same as his. I believe in haein' a' things in keepin', and maybe if I had guid tweed claes and a white stairched shirt it wad hae made a' the difference.

His braw belangin's, white shirts, and guid seegaurs were an awfu' hert-break to Uncle Eb. But they were a source o' secret pride to his mither, and I ken his Uncle Dauvid gied him credit for bein' sae sensible as no' to hae them if he couldna afford them.

CHAPTER II

DOD, man, it maun be a money-makin' job that stockbrokin', for I ken, for a certainty, that he hadna been a pairtner for three years till he had over three thoosan' pounds o' his ain in the bank.

Aince when he was doon veesitin' his mither for a week-end I asked him hoo it was dune. He gied a wee bit lauch, and explained to his Uncle Eb and me a' aboot the buyin' and sellin' o' shares, and bears and bulls and sic like. The Glesca Exchange, he said, was a wonderfu' place. He ca'd it the "hub" o' business, and said if yin exercised discretion, combined wi' a sprinklin' o' pluck and pawkiness, it was surprisin' hoo quickly money could be made. I asked him quite seriously if he was quite sure and convinced within his ain mind that it was an honest way o' turnin' the penny, and he told me frankly that there

was no dubiety in his mind on that point. Mair than that, he said if I had ony desire to mak' a hunner pounds oot o' fifty, he would try his best to put me in the way o' daein' sae.

Dod, man, when his Uncle Eb heard this his een bulged oot like glessy bools. The prospect fairly took his breath away. "Eh, Lord," said he, "cent per cent is scarcer than layin' cockerels. If it's a deid certainty, Robert, it's faur better than keepin' hens, and if Doo has a shot at it, and if you're perfectly sure there's nae chance o' losin' the fifty, I'll gang in if you'll let me."

Though I had a' the siller that was needed, and the greatest faith in Robert, I was in a bit o' a quandary, as I didna see hoo I could launch into a great affair o' this kind withoot Grizzly kennin' o't. Personally I was juist jumpin' to try it, but I kenned Grizzly's canny, cautious disposition, and was feared she wad put a damper on't at the ootset, so I kept my counsels to mysel'.

On the Monday mornin', however, I gaed doon to the bank, and had a word wi' Maister Austin on the maitter, tell't him—on the quiet,

of coorse—o' the hale project, and gied him the name o' the Copper Company Robert had recommended to me. Weel, after hearin' my story, and after consultin' some papers, ne tell't me he thocht I was a' richt, and, mair than that, he was half-minded to have a try wi' this on his ain accoont. That was guid enough for me, so after consultin' wi' Eb I wrote to Robert, and the affair was cairret through for baith him and me.

Eh, man, what a time that was ! The shares o' the company were staunin' at five shillin's apiece, so that ye see for fifty pounds each Eb and me becam' possessors o' twae hunner shares.

And then the fun began.

I got a newspaper regularly every mornin', and, believe me, I coul'na tak' my porridge till I had a keek at the list and seen hoo things were staunin'. For the first thr mornin's there was nae change, but, on the fourth, they raise to six-and-sixpence, then to seven-and-six, and when they touched ten shillin's, Eb forgot to feed the hens and I nearly fainted. Wark was oot o' the question, and I just dauner'd the flags in front o' my hoose wi'

my slippers on. Man, the sunshine seemed to be everywhere, and the wee bit birdies sang as they never had sung before. I had a cheery nod and a smile for everybody, forby a bawbee each to twae men who were singin' on the street. Mary Simpson's weans were playin' aroon the tree and I gied them three peppermint draps apiece and a penny to divide amongst them. Wee Andra looked up at me, and says he, "Is this the fair-day, Maister Doo?" and I said, "Yes, Andra, my callant, it's the fairest day I've seen for mony a year," and he gaed away wi' a face smilin' frae lug to laggan.

Eb and me, ye see, had pledged oorsels to secrecy—no' to tell a leevin' sowl what was on, and I never was sae muckle putten aboot, for Grizzy was giein' me, at this time, kippered herrin' and boiled eggs, mornin' aboot, for my breakfast, and I was juist deein' to tell her I wanted the best boiled ham at one-and-fivepence the pound, and salmon at three shillin's, and that I could weel afford it. I had serious thochts o' throwin' attic windows oot on the roof o' my hoose; in fact, I drew oot

a plan that same nicht, but the next mornin' when I looked the paper, dod, man, they had drappit to eicht shillin's, and I put the plan in the fire. Someway I didna feel very weel that mornin', the sunshine wasna nearly sae bricht and the birds werena singin' sae cheerily. I had nae great appetite for my boiled egg, but a' the same I asked a fervent blessin' ower my breakfast, and thanked the Almichty for providin' me wi' sic a nice fresh egg.

Puir Eb, wha before this hadna been sure whether he was staunin' on his heid or his heels, mixed saut, saut tears wi' his hens' meat that mornin'. He swore there was some damned blackguards workin' again' him in Glesca, and he gaed away doon and tell't Jardine the shoemaker not to go on wi' the makin' o' the pair o' new buits he had ordered.

It was a lang, queer day that, and Eb and me keepit weel oot o' yin anither's ways.

But next mornin' they were back at ten shillin's, and when they got to twal'-and-six I bocht Grizzy a black silk apron and a grey Shetland shawl, and I gied Edgar the joiner

an order for three new tressels and twae hods, for which I had as muckle need as a cairt has for a third wheel. As for Eb, he was juist like a flea on a blanket. He whuppet oot o' his hoose into mine, dogget my steps wherever I gaed, sae much sae that Grizzy began to smell a rat.

Man. I was beginnin' to feel selfish and mean and miserable, keepin' a' this thing to mysel' and f' her, and it worried me sae much that I beg'd Eb to free me o' my promise, which he did, and I tell't her a' about it as plainly and fully as I could. After I had finished, she sat quiet for a wee, then says she, "Ay. Ye bocht thae things, twae hunner o' them, ten days since at five shillin's each, and they're noo worth twal'-and-sixpence apiece. What has made them rise in price like that?"

I frankly tell't her I didna ken and I didna care, but that there was nae hanky-pankyin' about it, that it was in Robert Fairley's haun, and she micht stake her Family Bible that everything was strecht and abune board.

She didna say ocht to that, but she seemed to think a lot, and I saw it was worryin' her;

so when I saw hoo she was takin' on aboot it I made up my mind to hae dune wi't, for, tho' it was a payin' ploy, the excitement was keepin' me off my sleep, and I had nae relish for honest mason wark that brocht in maybe twae pounds ten a week, when I was makin' at the rate o' twenty-five pounds a day withoot turnin' my thoom for it. So I wrote to Robert to put in the pin, as it were, which he did the day he got my letter, when the shares were staunin' at fifteen shillin's, and he sent me a cheque for a hunner and fifty pounds, which I payed into the bank, and it's there yet; and the income-tax man is nane the wiser and nane the richer.

Grizzy's not very sure aboot it yet, for, as she says, if I made a' that profit then somebody must hae lost it, which is true enouch, I daursay, but the maitter is ower bamboozlin' for my limited intellect, and as I'm gifted wi' the haudin' senses I'm stickin' to the siller, and not only am I gratefu' to Robert Fairley, but I'm terribly weel satisfied wi' the transaction.

Ay, ay! Weel, man, as I said, things prospered michtily wi' Robert in Glesca, and

kindly-herted laddie that he was he seemed anxious that a' his freens should share in his prosperity, for he gutted oot his uncle's shop, built a new store at the back wi' a substantial corrugated iron roof, and when it was feenished made him a present o' the hale concern. As for the furs and golden jewellery and sic-like, ye wadna believe what he sent to his mither. A' the presses and the drawers in the hoose were filled wi' gear that she couldna hae worn oot suppose she could hae lived to the age o' Methuselah. He keepit Uncle Eb in pipes and tobacco, and, what pleased Eb mair, sent at stated times wee bags filled wi' a special kind o' meal that, provided hens were kept warm, made them lay as regularly in the winter as the summer-time. He subscribed liberally, but anonymously, to the soup kitchen and ither charities, and mony a puir auld sowl durin' the drieck cauld winter months had reason to bless his name.

Then, man, a terrible thing happened. Ae mornin' his mither got a telegram frae his pairtner sayin' Robert had met wi' an accident, and that she had to come up to Glesca without

delay. Nae particulars were gien, and Mrs. Fairley, withoot much preparation, and wi' a sair, heavy, apprehensive hert, got away wi' the first train. Durin' the afternoon we got nae word, but when the evenin' papers cam' in, there, in black and white, was an account o' the hale affair. It was heided, "Terrible Accident to a prominent Glasgow Stock-broker," and it gaed on to tell hoo that a horse yoked to an empty lorry had ran away in Buchanan Street, just when that place was at its busiest, and hoo that Mr. Fairley, foreseein' the damage that was likely to be wrocht, and withoot considerin' the danger to his ain life, sprang at the horse's heid when it was passin' him. He grippet the shaft first, then flew at the horse's heid and got it by the neck, but it was a big, strong brute, and no easily stoppit, and after careerin' half-way doon the street wi' him clingin' to its collar it swerved on to the pavement, and they baith dashed thegither into a big shop window. The horse was killed on the spot, and Mr. Fairley was ta'en to the Infirmary in what was feared was a dyin' condition. A lady and her wee dochter

had been knocked doon and run over before Mr. Fairley tackled the runaway, and their injuries were such—the paper said—that little hope was entertained o' their recovery.

Man, man, I'll never forget that evenin'. The news gaed frae door to door through the village like wildfire, and mony hertfelt prayers gaed up that nicht to God frae suppliants wha didna bother Him often.

Dauvid Morrison didna pray, but he was very quiet and subdued, and he gied nae superior cast o' his heid when he saw puir auld Uncle Eb gaun away into his bedroom-closet wi' a weel-thoomed Bible aneath his oxtter.

Where womenfolk were gathered at the check o' their doors, boys roon the cross, or men at the corner, this terrible accident was the subject o' their crack. And then, after yin o' the langest nights I mind o', and juist when the post office was openin', a telegram cam' frae Mrs. Fairley to Dauvid. A' it said was, "Robert holding his own." It wasna very much, but it was enouch whereon to build oor hopes and to let us gang to oor day's wark wi' a wee bit crust o' consolation.

Holding his own ! We a' kenned he wud dae that wherever he was or whatever condition he micht be in, and we also knew that the stored-up energies o' a clean, well-spent life wad staun him in guid stead in his 'oor o' need.

Next day, Mrs. Fairley unexpectedly returned, and she wasna weel ir. the hoose till I was sent for. Never while I live will I forget that meetin'.

The parlour was juist as she had left it twae days before, for neither Dauvid nor Uncle Eb had ony faculty, or, in the circumstances, ony hert for reddin' up, and the workin' apron she had hurriedly ta'en off and flung aside was lyin' ower the back o' the easy-chair, and a pair o' clogs wi' the soles turned up lay in the middle o' the floor. She was sittin' wi' a grey, tear-stained face opposite Dauvid—her bonnet strings untied and hingin' ower her shooder, and her lang active fingers grippin' the cream-coloured lace at the neckband o' her goon. Dauvid, wi' stern, set features, was staunin' wi' his back to the licht, subdued, as I've said, but defiant, and scarcely believin'

that this dispensation was bein' veeisited on his hoose. Uncle Eb, huddled up wi' his knees at his chin, was sittin' away back in the shadowy corner, like a crow in a mist, and his lang, pointed face was the livin' picture o' misery at its deepest. The very atmosphere o' the room breathed o' despair, and sair at hert, but not surprised, I learned by degrees frae Mrs. Fairley that Robert wad never again be able to put a foot on the grun', and that the days o' a promising young life were already numbered.

His auld schule chum, the great Dr. Dalziel, a dalesman o' oor ain, had performd ony operation that was necessary. Everything had been dune that could be dune—the best skill available had been consulted, and the dread verdict had been pronounced.

I looked first at yin and then at anither, wi' not a word on my lip, but wi' sympathy in my hert deep as the flood, and I went back to the hoose and sent Grizzy to minister—as only Grizzy can—to three puir auld stricken sows whase idol had fallen, and lay crushed and broken for ever.

As for mysel', I went into my wee back-closet, steekin' the door to be alone wi' my Maker, and my hert was chilled and the stars abune were shinin' steely and cauld when I went oot that nicht to lock the gairden gate.

CHAPTER III

It is only when an experience o' this kind comes to oor ain door that we can truly realise how poor and frail we are, and how utterly impotent even the skilliest can be. There was that great strong, powerfu' young man, that splendid specimen o' humanity—baith mentally and physically—lyin' in a fremit bed, in a fremit toon, as helpless as a wean,—surrounded by every comfort that siller could command, attended by the greatest physicians in the country, waited on by the best-trained nurses o' the institution, and prayed for frae village herts in which faith was strong,—and yet, a' was in vain—a' in vain.

On the fourth day, after he had wakened oot o' a short, snatchy sleep, he asked for his mother. Fortunately she had again gaen north that mornin', and had juist arrived, so they brocht her in. The injuries he had sus-

tained were mainly in the spine, and he could neither raise his haun nor move his heid to greet her, but he turned his big eyes eagerly as she entered the door. He was quite conscious, and he noticed she was sairly putten aboot, for to reassure her he told her not to be anxious and concerned aboot him, as he was fine and comfortable, and quite free o' pain. But a teardrap broke frae his e'e and slowly trickled doon his cheek. He couldna wipe it away, but *she* did, and his helplessness cam' hame to him, and the sabbin' o' a strong man broke the stillness o' that darkened room.

She wasna allowed to stay very lang beside him, and before o' left he asked her to bring me up wi' her the ney, and for me to arrange to stay in the toon so that I could be near him, for he had a lot to say to me, and couldna say it a' at aince.

Weel, as you can unnerstaun, his wish was to me a command, which I obeyed. I stayed wi' Rettie, my mairret dochter, and I was allowed to sit wi' him for an 'oor every day.

After a', he hadna much to say to me, at least onything o' any importance. His lack

o' strength maybe kept him quiet, but every day he assured me that he was happier, kennin me beside him, and that he juist felt as he did in the auld days when he cooriet his heid aneath my jacket durin' a thunder and lightnin' storm.

I had been wi' him for aboot a week, and, on the Friday before the Saturday when I was gaun hame, he says to me, "Robert, d'ye mind, long ago, when you were takin' me a walk doon the auld toon road you told me that when an old hare felt its end approachin' it came back to the scenes of its leveret days to die?"

"I dinna remember the exact circumstances," says I, "but what ye say, Robert, I believe is true, and it's quite possible I tell't ye sae. But what about it, onyway?"

He didna answer me for a wee while, and then he looked earnestly at me, and, says he, "I'm juist like that old hare. I'm dying, and, oh man, Robert, I don't want to die here. Take me back with you to Thornhill, to my ain wee bedroom with its gable window and its whitewashed walls. I'll no' weary, for

my mither will be there, and you'll be next door, and I'll see the trees on the street from my window, and I'll hear the Auld Kirk bell strikin' the hours which are so long and dreary here. I know I canna stand this very long, my time is short, let it be happy. Oh man, Robert, take me home."

I wasna surprised when he said this, as ony bit crack we had had was aboot auld times and auld scenes, and I kenned the grip that Thornhill had o' his hert-strings. His earnestness was touchin', and I didna ken very well what to say, but I told him I would speak to the doctors, and if they judged his strength sufficient to carry him sae far, I wad see him hame.

That nicht Mrs. Fairley and I approached Dr. Dalziel on the subject, and he, after consultin' wi' the ithers, sanctioned his removal, but suggested we should wait for anither week. Travelling by train was oot o' the question, so the doctor arranged for a nice roomy ambulance, and also for five relays o' horses,—for it's a langish journey,—and I'll never forget the look that broke over Robert's face when we told him what we had done. The doctor gied

him particulars aboot the stoppin'-places, and where the horses wad be changed, and says he, "And, Robert, my boy, I'll travel with you all the way, and after I've seen you comfortably settled in that wee bedroom you talk so much aboot, I'll take a turn through Penpont to Merkland and see once more the hills I climbed and the braes I ran in the days o' auld lang syne."

But he didna tell him that he had written to Thornhill to William Kellock to come up and drive the ambulance, and it someway took away frae the tragedy o' the stretcher and its helpless burden that day at the Infirmary door, to see the surprised, delighted look that flashed frae the patient to his auld freen William, as that worthy stood at his horses' heids, wi' his silver-buttoned coat and his lum hat on. Not a word o' recognition passed between them, but William put his haun up as much as to say, "I'm here, Maister Robert, rest content, where horses can gang I'll tak' ye in safety." And Robert understood.

It was a lang, tryin' journey, and a sad yin. But not a complaint did my puir crippled

laddie mak'. Every mile we passed was a mile nearer hame, and that knowledge seemed to cheer and comfort him.

He kenned that the last change o' horses was at Sanquhar, and after we had left that toon behind us he becam' a wee excited, and every noo and then asked hoo far we were on. He knew when we were nearin' Carronbrig, for the ring o' the smith's hammer cam' soundin' up the Waulkmill brae, and he smiled when he heard it, and asked that we micht stop at the smiddy door—"for," said he, "I never passed thro' the village withoot callin' on the smith. He made the first gird I ever trundled, and, someway, I don't want to pass his door the day."

I thocht within my ain mind that he should be spared the pain o' meetin' his auld freen under sic circumstances, but the doctor thocht otherwise. When he was signin' to William to stop he looked at me as much as to say, "Don't thwart him; give him his own way; it'll no' be for long." And I was satisfied, for I kenned that he knew best.

We stopped juist for a minute, but it seemed

a lang yin. Sandie the smith had been workin' hard, and was perspirin' freely, but when we were movin' away frae the door there were drops fa'in' on his rough leather apron that wasna sweat, and his anvil was silent and stilled for the rest o' that day.

When we arrived at Thornhill, strong, willing arms werena wantin' to carry him up to his wee room, and a smile o' satisfaction broke over his face when we laid him on his bed; and, dod, man, when his e'e lichted on his auld chest o' drawers wi' the stuffed hoolet, wi' the bell glass ower't, staunin' on the big illustrated Bible, and the string o' whaup's eggs hingin' frae the top drawer knob, he lauched wi' delight, and said, "Oh, Doctor! oh, Robert! thank God I'm home at last!"

CHAPTER IV

As you can weel understaun', I had a lot to tell Grizzy that nicht when I got into my ain hoose, for it didna happen very often that I had occasion to be sae lang away frae hame, and as events, ye ken, had been comin' crowdin' sae fast, as it were, on each ither's heels, and as everything had to be talked ower, it was faur on i' the nicht before oor crack was dune. The questions she had to ask were by-ordinar, but the yin that was uppermost in her mind was the yin that, womanlike, she kept to the very last.

She had gane to her bed and had kept the crack gaun wi' her heid on the pillow, and I was juist takin' a final puff o' my pipe before I blew oot the cannel, when she gied a bit hoast, and, says she, "Whae were a' at the Infirmary door to see Robert, puir laddie, away?"

I named them a' as far as I kenned, and

then says she, "D'ye no' think that he's a gey likely man to hae a sweetheart? Was there naebody among the womenfolk that seemed like 'im in that way?"

"No," says I, after I had thocht a wee. "No, Grizzy, there was naebody about the door that I could fit wi' a cap o' that kind. What has put that notion in your heid?"

"Oh, I dinna ken," says she. "Only Robert's a very braw man, and a guid man into the bargain, and, as a woman, I wad say he's no there to this time o' day without haein' some yin's happy future in his keepin', and a sair, sair hert she'll hae this nicht, puir thing, or I'm gey far mistaken."

Dod, man, to be candid and honest, sic a thocht had never entered my heid, but ower anither half-pipefu' o' baccy I reviewed in my mind his way o' livin' for the last seven years, the chances he had o' mixin' wi' the best and the highest, and the kindly, lovin' disposition he possessed, and, like Grizzy, I cam' to the conclusion that, in a' possibility, there *was* a worthy lass whase hert that nicht was stricken and sair.

Lang after I had gane to my bed this subject kept runnin' in my mind, and then I thocht o' my faither and the scene at the Braid Burn Brig, and slowly I dovered into a sweet land o' dreams in which the angel face o' Elsie Gardiner smiled to me as through a mist o' tears.

Doctor Dalziel, wi' his usual forethocht and consideration, had omitted nothing, and two capable nurses had been engaged, yin for duty durin' the day and the ither for the night. This relieved oor minds o' ony responsibility in sic a serious case, and it also gied us the blessed assurance that everything that science and the ingenuity o' man could devise would be done to mak' his shortenin' span o' life as comfortable as possible.

Nurse Bennoch, wha had been up a' night, was comin' doon the stairs the next mornin' when I steppit alang to learn hoo he was keepin', and she gied me the welcome news that, so far as she could see, he was nothing the worse of the journey of the previous day, but she shook her heid and tell't me quietly, that, all the same, the end micht come at any

time. "By the way," she said, "a letter came in this morning which, of course, he cannot open, and which he wouldn't allow me to open and read to him. He told me it could wait till you came in, and, as he's excited a little over it, it is well you're here."

When I sat doon at the bedside there was an air o' forced composure aboot him, and the unopened letter was lyin' on his briest on the top o' the counterpane. After tellin' me aboot a sweet 'oor's sleep he had had durin' the night, and o' the pleasure it gied him to be aince mair at hame, he broke off suddenly, and asked me what date it was.

I told him, and then he asked hoo lang he had been ill, and when I said, "Exactly twenty-three days," he seemed to be thoctfully considerin' something, and he said mair to himsel' than to me, "No, she doesn't know yet, but, puir lass, she'll learn to-day."

I didna bother him speakin', and we were baith quiet. Then after a lang silence he said, "Robert, I'm a big, helpless fellow lyin' here, and I don't know what I would do without you. May God reward you. . . . I have a

letter here which I want you to open and read to me, but before doing so I would like you to know that—that if this terrible—if things, I mean, had been otherwise, I would have been married in about two months. I've been a very busy man, never had much time to devote to love affairs and thoughts o' marriage, but last year I met a lass—Alice M'Leod's her name, Robert—and sure God made her for me, for I've loved her with a fervour that has surprised me, and sometimes made me afraid. Ay, I love her with the love of a strong, strong man, and now—now, oh man, Robert, it's awful—awful,” and he shut his eyes very ticht and his whole frame shook.

I clapped him on the heid, and I wipet his cheek wi' my pocketnapkin as I wad hae dune to a hert-sair bairn, and when he had composed himsel' he gaed on wi' his story, but his voice a' at aince becam' very low and feeble.

“Three months ago she accompanied her father to Kimberley to see a mine they were interested in. During the last three weeks she's been aboard ship, homeward bound, and this letter from my partner will contain, I

presume, a wire telling when to expect her. I dreamed last night that this would come about in this way, and now—that's all, Robert. Will you please open that letter ? ”

He was quite richt, his dream was true, there was a telegram enclosed in the letter, and I read it oot first. All it said was, “ Arrived here Southampton safely to-day due Glasgow St. Enochs 10.30 to-morrow. You will meet me I know. Much love.—ALICE.”

The letter was from his pairtner, and was to the effect that he had taken the liberty of opening the telegram, and begged to assure Robert that he would meet Miss M'Leod on her arrival and acquaint her with the sad news of his accident. “ Very possibly,” it ran, “ she will wish to come on to Thornhill to see you. If you are strong enough, and if the excitement of meeting her will not be too much for you, wire me, and I will know what to do and how to advise her.” It was a nice, considerate letter, and finished up with hopes that he was feeling better and that he had stood the journey well.

I laid it doon when I had read it through,

and Robert said nocht for a wee. I got up quietly frae my chair and walked up to the wee gable window. Away doon on the street merry-faced bairns were playin' at their games, men intent on their business and wark were bizzin' about, birds were singin' in the trees, and young and active life was evidenced everywhere: while in this wee room a tragedy was slowly being enacted which made God's mornin' sunshine strangely oot o' place. And I stood there, wi' hard, bitter thochts surgin' in my brain, and the Why and the Wherefore o' life distracted me, and I asked mysel'—
Why does tragedy trip up comedy when the laugh's at the loodest, and why is pain and sufferin' and hert-breaks sae rampant in this world when a God o' Love rules and reigns in the heaven? And then a' at aince His words cam' to me, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts," and I turned, chastened and humbled, and sat doon at the bedside.

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"Robert," I said, wi' a bit catch in my breath which I couldna help, "I'm thinkin' you'll be wantin' me to wire for her to come."

"Yes, oh yes, Robert," he said feebly. "And I trust she'll come to-day, for I feel—I feel—someway that another sun will never rise for me."

A great change seemed to hae come over him, and I kissed his brow and soothed him a' I could. Then the nurse cam' in, and I gaed doon the stairs and sent away the wire to his Glesca office as I had been directed.

He was very "dowie" and quiet a' day, but when it wore into the afternoon and aboot the time he was expectin' her, he got a wee bit cheerier. Aboot four o'clock, when I was sittin' readin' at his request John Galt's *Annals of the Parish*, the 'bus stopped at the door. I closed the book, and got up to gang oot, but he signed me to sit still.

A minute later, a tall, quietly dressed young lady opened the door and glided into the room. She saw nothing but the bed and nobody but Robert, and wi' a sabbin' cry, like a poor wounded bird, she gaed doon on her knees at

the laigh bedside, and buried her face in his neck.

For the second time in my life I felt I was in the presence o' some yin sacred, and, wi' my hert beatin' wildy and my face turned away, I tiptoed oot and left them there their lane.

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When the birds were chirpin' Guid Mornin' in the lime tree at the gable window, and juist as the sun's first rays lay athwart the valley he loved so well, wi' totterin' steps he ga: l doon the bank o' Jordan, and his soul was launched into the Great Unknown.

CHAPTER V

Yes, man, it micht be considered by some a queer by-ordinar remark to mak', but the langer I live, and the mair I come into what I micht ca' personal grips wi' my fellow-beings, the mair am I convinced that there's a bit corner in the hert o' every man and every woman that is sacred to the memory o' a love o' long ago.

Mind you, it micht be a very wee, wee corner —juist a nimp, as it were, but, tak' my word for't, in the generality o' cases it is big enough to hae sheltered, lang and deep, the hallowed lingerin' memory o' a short, yet sweet, pure and unreasonin' love, which throughout the journey o' life has added a sweetness to the fragrance o' the hawthorn, has made a summer Sabbath gloamin' a thing sacred and apart, and turned the trill o' the mavis and the lay o' the laverock into an angel sang. And the

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pressure o' a saft lassie haun, the glint o' a fearless boyish e'e, bridges the present to the days o' auld lang syne, and opens the door to memories o' times that will never come again.

The fire at which the torch o' early love was lit is seldom the yin that keeps the lowe alunt in the days that are to come. Oor pairtners in the maurch o' life are very rarely the recipients o' oor first ardent love and devotion, and, tho' a man may hae the best wife in the world, and that wife, the man abune a' men for her, yet each, ye may be sure, has the memory o' that early love carefully treasured—that wee bit corner safely guarded, often secretly—ay, sometimes guiltily laid bare and made the subject o' lovin' retrospect and reflection.

And ye maunna rin away wi' the idea that sic reflections are in ony way dishonourable or dishonouring. An auld cauf-love is never in opposition to that deeper and mair abidin' affection that mak's, for the happily mairret man and woman, the maurch o' life a maurch o' happiness. Compared wi' this it is dwarfish

and insignificant. But it is an experience o' life which is no' easily lived doon or forgotten, and which needs but the lilt o' an auld love-sang, a youthfu' ripplin' lauch, or the glint o' a fresh blue e'e to tak' to itsel' a vim and vitality which years can never shake or time destroy.

My ain experience o' this dates back to a time when simmer days seemed langer and warmer than they are noo, and, tho' I hae passed the Psalmist's span o' threescore-years-and-ten, and reached an age when the things that are before are o' mair import than the things that are behind, there are times, I maun confess, when a lassie face, which is no' Grizzy's, comes up before me, when her livin' presence seems wi' me, and I see oor trystin'-place among the silver birks on the auld quarry knowe lit up and suffused wi' the purple rays o' a summer sun that will never set for me.

I've never mentioned this to onybody, not even to Grizzy, and it is a sealed book to a', binna maybe Maggie Howieson hersel', and tho' she's been a mairret woman for over fifty

years and a granny for thirty, it is juist possible that, noo and then, when she sees me gaun doon the street, her mind will hark back to a time when her guidman, Davie Howieson, had neither airt nor pairt in her life, and when a story, which she dootless was expectin', was simmerin' in my mind, and which needed only the glamour o' the sunset licht among the birks and the quietness o' the simmer gloamin' to bring to my lips. But that story was never told by me. And I thank God that I was dumb, for, after a', there was only ae lassie for me, and that lassie was Grizzy, my Grizzy wha for twae-and-fifty years has shared my joys and my sorrows, and proved hersel' a helpmate sic as I little expected to hae, and maist assuredly better than I ever deserved.

So ye see that I, like ithers, hae my hallowed memory—a consecrated spot in my auld hert which even Grizzy kens nocht aboot, and which, by noo-and-then communin's, I hae keepit fresh and green.

And what o' Grizzy? Has she hers also? Weel, juist you listen to what I hae to say.

The ither nicht I was lookin' ower some o'

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my ootstaunin' accoonts, and I cam' across yin, amountin' to three pounds nine shillin's, for mason wark I had wrocht to Jeems Henderson the shoemaker, and which, tho' I had sent it oot twice a year for the last three years, was still unpayed.

A cheery fire was burnin' behin' the ribs, throwin' oot a gratefu' heat and makin' the weel-burnished fire-erns skinkle like a kittlin's e'e. Grizzy was sittin' on her auld laigh nursin' chair turnin' the heel o' a stockin' for hersel', and mony a furtive keek did I tak' at her sweet, contented face and her tidy black-gooned figure as she sat, knit, knittin' away, as intent on her wark as if her very breath depended on the next stitch she made.

The langer I sat and pondered ower Jeems Henderson's account the mair perplexed and dissatisfied I becam', for, let me tell ye, Jeems was a man for whom I had a lang-staunin' unbounded regaird, and it was beginnin' to dawn upon me that in no' comin' to a settlement he was imposin' on my guid natur' and stretchin' the threed o' freenship to a by-ordinar kittle strain. Within my ain mind I

made a' allowance for his thowless wife and his ill-doin' family, but a' the same, I thoct it very unfair he should keep me oot o' money for which I had wrocht sae hard, and which, sae lang bygane, should hae been mine.

"Grizzy," says I at length, "I doot I'll hae to tak' to the law wi' Jeems Henderson aboot that accoont. It's mair than three years since I finished his job, and I've never yet seen the colour o' his siller."

Grizzy's thochts were far away, for she lookit up at me wi' a surprised, questionin' look in her e'e.

"What's that you're sayin' aboot Jeems Henderson?" she asked.

"It's aboot that accoont o' his," says I, "and I was remarkin' that, if it wasna payed sune, I wad put the law on him."

"What does puttin' the law on him mean?" she asked, and she got up, kind o' hurriedly, laid aside her knittin', and walkin' up to the winda table began to dry some bowls that werena wet.

"Weel," says I, "it means that he'll be ta'en to the court, and, for a man o' Jeems Hender-

son's retirin' independent disposition, it'll no' be a very pleasant predicament to be placed in. But we maun hae oor ain, ye ken, Grizzy, and he had nae business to order the wark to be dune if he didna see his way to pay for it."

"Oh, but I've nae doot ye'll be payed, Robert," says she. "Jeems Henderson has aye been an honourable man, and tho' he's had a lot to do wi' the few bawbees that come to his haun, he'll no' ken you loss by him. What wark did ye do for him?"

I read ower the different items which made up the amount, and which had a' to do wi' the repairin' o' the main drain o' his dwellin'-hoose.

"That," says Grizzy, "was work o' necessity and, in the interest o' his family's health, it had to be dune."

Frae the tone o' her voice and the birrin' way she was rubbin' at the bowls I could judge that Jeems, in some way, had a champion in Grizzy.

"Weel, weel," says I, "necessity or no necessity, the wark was dune, and weel dune, and I

maun be payed, or the law must tak' its coorse."

Grizzy said nocht for a wee, and she put what I considered a lot o' most unnecessary polishin' on her delf.

"I wad raither ye didna tak' Jeems Henderson to the law, Robert," she said, wi' a wee bit catch in her voice.

"Mercy on me, Grizzy, my lass, what maitters it to you whether I do or no'?"

"Oh, weel—really it doesna maitter—at least, no' much, or I should say that it shouldna maitter—only, ye see, Jeems belongs to Barjarg—he was born next door to us. Him and me were at the same schule thegither, and—— Weel, altho' we're no' a drap's bluid to yin anither, the very fact o' him bein' Barjarg, and a companion o' my early days, mak's him different, in a way, to the rest o' folk."

Grizzy was staunin' between me and the licht, but tho' her face was in the shadow I could tell that it was flushed, and, man, d'ye ken, in a moment—in a flash, as it were, the memory o' the purple sunset among the silver

birks cam' to me, and, dod, thinks I, "has Grizzy, like me her Auld Quarry Knowe?"

I didna say oot for a wee, and neither did Grizzy, but the clock ticked awfu' lood, and a lowin' coal drappet oot o' the ribs wi' a loodish clash, and rattelled' unheeded into the ash-hole.

"Ay," she continued, when the quietness was gettin' juist a kennin' oppressive. "It mak's a' the difference when ye've kenned yin a' your life."

"Yes—yes, I daursay, Grizzy, that is so; and—was—was Jeems a nice boy at the schule?" I asked, juist for something to say.

"He *was* that," she said, wi' a wee bit forced lauch. "He was an awfu' boy for fechtin', but he was aye kind to the lassies. I mind, ae day when I was gettin' the tawse for speakin' in the class, he began to greet, and cam' up to the maister and tell't him to stop lickin' me, and—dear me, hoo it a' comes back—on the road gaun hame that nicht he took my haun and he tell't me he wad raither hae got the tawse than me. When we cam' to oor gate he went into his ain bit gairden plot, and pu'd some

pansies and a bit sidderwood, and when he gied me them he said he was sorry he had nae roses, for roses—white yins—wad aye be for me. And then, Robert—then—he kissed me, and I let him."

I wasna surprised when she said that, for I someway kenned it was comin'.

"Ay, Grizzy, lass, and Jeems kissed you, and ye didna object?"

"No, I didna object."

"Ay—and what did ye wi' the bits o' flo'ers, Grizzy?"

Man, she cam' ower beside me, and, staunin' at the back o' my easy-airm-chair, she put her fingers throug my thin silvered hair juist as my faither used to do when my heid was broon and curly. "What I'm tellin' ye, Robert, happened lang afore I met you. A woman never forgets the man that first payed homage to her, and tho' Jeems Henderson, durin' a' these years, has been a memory only, the flo'ers he gied me on that bygone simmer nicht are in my keepin' still."

Walkin' ower to the chiffonier she lifted doon her grandfaither's family Bible, and there,

flattened o'-t, and withered and broon, between the leaves o' her favourite—the thirty-fifth chapter o' Isaiah—was the pledge o' Jeems Henderson's love for Grizzy which he had gien her sixty years ago.

There are times in the experience of all when yin feels that words are utterly incapable o' expressin' yin's feelings — when speech is empty, ay, when even to speak seems a sin!

I felt like this, and so did Grizzy, and again the clock ticked lood. Side by side lay the open ledger and the open Bible, Jeems Henderson's obligation to me in the yin, and his loving pledge to Grizzy in the ither. Grizzy stood at the table lookin' at them wi' a tear-drap on her cheek, and then she gaed to put them away.

"One moment, my dear aul lass," says I. And I took my pen and, scorin' the accoont frae corner to corner, I wrote across it, "Settled."

She looked at me for a minute wi' thae big moist een o' hers, and wi' that wee bit smile on her face, which is the index o' her guid pure soul, and then withoot a word she cooriet

doon on the hearthrug by my side, and there
in the flickerin' firelicht, wi' her heid again' my
knee, and my wrinkled haun on her shoulder,
the memories o' the Auld Quarry Knowe and
the bunch o' withered flo'ers faded away like
the rime o' an August mornin'.

CHAPTER VI

It is a well-known everyday sayin' that there are tricks in a' trades except yin's ain. It is only wi' experience o' life that the truth o' some o' these auld sooths comes, as it were, forcibly hame, and, on lookin' back, and reviewin' in my mind a' I have had to do wi' tradesmen o' ae kind and anither, I am forced to confess that there's a guid sprinklin' o' truth in this particular auld by-remark.

It is generally allowed that grocers damp their sugar, dairymen water their milk, millers tak' liberties wi' their meal, joiners use wood when it's green, plumbers—oh, plumbers! Eh, man, what deevils *they* are. Dod, give a roon-shoodered plumber a hapenny cannel, and let him into a dark corner wi' a solderin' bolt and a pot o' smudge. Leave him there wi' auld Nick and to his ain meditations, and tak' a dauner doon the length o' the cross

“

to see what the weather's gaun to do. When ye come back, certie, he'll hae a hole in that corner the size o' a wee wean's grave, the walls will be splashed black and white like a dambrod, the whole place'll hae a smell like a gas retort, and, like as no', at New Year time ye'll get an accoont for mendin' a leakage that will mak' your hair staun on end and spoil your palate for tastin' the best currant bun that ever was made.

Plumbers! oh, the deevils. I ken them weel. I've had them through my hauns, or, raither, they've had me through theirs, and I havena forgotten aboot it yet. But, quirky as they may be, and conscienceless as grocers and dairymen are, they're no' to be mentioned in the same breath wi' horsedealers.

Spurgeon, the great preacher, used to say that there were three surprises in store for him in the next world. The first was, he wad miss in heaven some folk he expected he wad see there; the second, he wad see some there he hadna reckoned on seein'; and the third, and the biggest surprise o' a', that he wad be there himsel'.

Had Spurgeon been a horsedealer instead o' the faithful preacher and man o' God he was, I would have said "Amen" wi' a' my hert to that last remark.

Don't think noo that I'm lackin' in charity o' judgment, or that I'm by-ordinar hard on the dealin' fraternity. I really wish to be just and unbiassed, and if, after hearin' my story, you think my remarks uncalled for and unwarranted, I'll willingly tak' them back and do my best to mak' amends.

You'll mind, I daursay, what I told ye about my experience wi' Alec Ashplant ower the buyin' o' a coo. I considered that a by-ordinar soople bit o' wark, but dod, man, it was a Sabbath-schule-trip affair compared wi' what auld Ben Brecham did to me ower the buyin' o' a black horse.

A few years bygane I had a fairish-sized job up at the Sweetbit, and as the distance was juist too much to walk nicht and mornin', and work a day's wark into the bargain, I made up my mind that I wad buy a horse. Lang before this I had got a thief's bargain o' a spring-cairt and a set o' harness at Robert

Kellock's sale, and, as I had kept them beside me in guid condition, a' that I wanted to complete the turnoot was the horse, and this, as I tell ye, I made up my mind to procure.

You'll maybe no' mind o' "Bowlie." No? Weel, it doesna maitter. Puir sowl he didna coont for much when he was leevin', but Rob Tait was his name, though he was aye ca'd "Bowlie" because o' his bent legs. He was for lang an odd man aboot the hotel stables, and at times, either did a bit deal on his ain, when he had siller to speculate, or aided and abetted them wha had. To a' appearance he had no truck wi' Brecham, but a' the same they were hand in glove, as I found oot to my cost. Weel, "Bowlie" used to pass my door half a dozen times a day, and mony a confab him and me had—aye on horses or crapa, for he couldna ca' the crack on ony-thing else; so, in course as it were, I mentioned to him that I was on the look oot for a horse, and asked him if he knew o' ony beast likely to suit my purpose. I kenned he hadna yin o' his ain, for he was walkin' almost on his uppers, and, to my certain knowledge, had

been teetotal through stress o' circumstances, as it were, for a very lang time.

"Bowlie" considered for a wee, and then says he, "Michty peety, Maister Doo, michty peety I've nocht o' my ain, for it's weel pleased I wad hae been to have had a deal wi' ye. But I'll keep ye in mind noo, that I will. By the bye, have ye mentioned the maitter to Brecham?"

"No," says I.

"Ah, man, speak to Brecham; he's the man for ye—or wait noo, hover a blink—ay, I'll speak to him, Maister Doo. Better me than you. Brecham's cute—deevilish cute, when there's a horse in the question, but—ahem, there's cuter than Brecham in this same wee Thornhill. Leave it wi' me, noo. I'll do the needfu'," and he waddled away up the street whistlin, "There is a Happy Land."

I'm not much o' a musician, but I knew it to be an auld Sabbath-schule hymn, and, forbye feelin' obliged to Bowlie for interestin' himsel' on my behalf, I harboured kindlier thochts o' him for havin' a tune o' that kind in his heid, and evidently in his hert.

Weel, sir, as it happened I met Brecham the very next mornin'. He was a well-set-up, comfortable-lookin' man, wi' square, broad shoulders, and a bare red face. He aye wore a big checked tail-coat, wi' side pockets and flappin' lappels, and his thin legs were aye cased, as it were, in ticht tweed leggin's, wi' wee mother-o'-pearl buttons doon the outside edge.

"Ay, ay, man Robert," says he very cheerily, "an' you're after a horse?"

"Yes," says I, "but I half left the maitter in Bowlie's hands, and——"

"Ay, ay, that's a' richt, that's richt enouch. Bowlie was tellin' me, surely, surely, imphm—— Weel, man, ye couldna hae come to me at a better time. Is't a cairt-horse you're after?"

"No, no, not at all," says I. "I want a bit canny beast for a spring-cairt, to tak' me to my work and back again."

"Juist that noo, so, so," says Brecham. "And are ye in a big hurry?"

"No," says I, "I'm in no particular hurry, but a' the same the sooner I'm suited the better."

"True, true, the sooner you're suited the better, as you say. Let me see, noo—this is

Monday—the morn's Tuesday, the next day's Wednesday—say Wednesday nicht then. You see, Robert, the particular horse I've in my e'e for you is at present at Traloss on the grass, but I'll send Bowlie up for him, and I'll hae him doon for your inspection and approval not the morn's nicht but the next. Lippen to me in this, and I'll see ye a' richt," and he clapped me on the shoulder in an extra friendly way, and away he mairched up the street wi' his heid in the air like a militia-man.

Weel, man, on the nicht as arranged on I was sittin' after my tea readin' the births, deaths, and marriages in the Dumfries paper, when I heard a rattle o' shod hoofs on the causeway at my door, and Brecham sayin' in a loodish voice, "Weel, Bowlie, you're well up to time. Man, man, he's doin' well on the grass—whoa, my boy, whoa, my beauty, tak' it easy, my braw boy. Gie him halter, Bowlie, gie him heid. There now, there——"

I laid doon my paper and stepped ca'fully to the door, and there stood Brecham wi' an ashplant fixed in his oxters and his thooms stuck into the armpits o' his double-breasted

waistcoat. He was staunnin' straddle-legged, wi' his heid critically to the side admiringly eyein' a big black melancholy-faced horse which Bowlie had by the heid.

Now, let me tell you, seriously and honestly, that I know as much aboot a horse as a hen knows aboot astronomy, and you'll agree wi' me that that's no' very much. By the same token let me say in passing that very few men-folk will own up to ignorance o' horse-flesh. It's very queer, but it's true, and why a horsey knowledge should be considered an accomplishment, guidness only kens. It may be that it's evidence o' a deevil-ma-care, fearless, over-rulin' disposition, a manly, reckless, domineerin' trait in the sterner sex which appeals to womenfolk in general. Or it may be a sign o' a free, open-air upbringin', and familiarity wi' a towsey, rough-and-ready phase o' life that knows few conventions, and which cannot be measured by the prosaic, matter-o'-fact, humdrum tradesman's line o' life. Be that as it may, the fact remains, as I've said, that the majority o' men have the horsey conceit, and what they don't know they affect; so, to be

accordin' to tradition, and in order to act the part, I pursed my lips and walked slowly roon that horse, lookin' as wise and wideawake as a "Trencher," but withoot sayin' a single word.

Brecham, I felt, was watchin' me very closely all the time, and when he saw me examinin' twae hairless spots on each o' its knees aboot the size o' a half-croon, he says to Bowlie, "Was he on the rocky grun' at Traloss a' the time?"

"Ay, he was," says Bowlie, "and he rises like a coo, hind end first; sair, sair on his knees, 'at is he."

I looked quickly up at Bowlie, but his face was as serious as a Chinaman's on a tea-chest.

I said nocht, but, like the sailor's parrot, I thocht a lot, and I wondered if Bowlie really imagined I wad be simpleton enough to believe such a fairy-tale. It put me on my guaird, however, and I cautiously and carefully continued my examination. I gripped the beast's legs below the knee, as I had often seen dealers do on the Dumfries Sands at the Rood Fair. I even opened his mooth and had a look at his

teeth, but, tho' it gratified my curiosity and was a tellin' bit o' pretended knowledge, I was very little the better or the wiser thereby, as you can very weel understand.

"Imphm! an' what d'ye ca' him?" says I, lookin' up at Brecham, juist for something to say.

"Ca' him," says Brecham—"what d'ye mean?"

"What's his name?" says I.

"Oh, his name—ay, ay, it's—— Bowlie, what's his name again?"

"Plunger," says Bowlie, withoot a blush, and he suddenly and withoot apparent cause began to whoa! whoa! and to ask the puir beast what he was bangin' at. So far as I could see, there wasna a bang left in him, but, as before, I held my tongue.

Round I went again and, dod, man, d'ye ken, the mair I looked at the horse the mair he looked at me. His e'e followed me everywhere, and wi' the queerest expression I ever saw. Sometimes it was waesome and pathetic—as much as to say, "Don't say ower much against me, be canny in your judgment, and for God's

sake buy me and gie me a short day's wark and a guid feed o' corn." Then at ither times the waesome and pathetic gied place to the skeich and deevil-ma-care which plainly said to me, "Don't for a moment think that my hingin' firple means mildness and gentleness, don't tak' me for an auld used-up yaud wi' no' a kick left in me." Dod, man, there was something human in the beast's e'e, and I felt quite guilty and creepy ways lookin' at it.

The sum and substance o' my scrutiny was that he was black in colour, wi' a white spot on his forheid, that he looked auld enough to hae been at Waterloo, that he had twae shauchlie hind legs and twae bent fore yins, a scraggy ill-conditioned tail, and twae rows o' the sharpest ribs I ever saw covered wi' a skin. As I've already said, I'm not an adept at judgin' a horse, but even to my untutored e'e, it was very evident that this yin wadna be very safe to lean against, and that he micht fa' doon, but wad never rin away, and this be-littlin' opinion was evidently expressed in my looks, for Brecham at once took speech in haun.

"Robert Doo," says he, "it's very plain to me that ye ken mair aboot a horse than ye let on, and—and——"

"Imphm," says I, wi' a weel-pleased, knowin' smile; "go on, Brecham."

"Weel, dash it a', man, withoot flatterin' ye I'll tell ye candidly that ye've spotted his weak spots—that I can see, and tho' I say it mysel' they're few and o' little importance. But I ken that you're equally well aware o' his guid points, and——"

"Ay, that's so, Brecham," says I; "he has ower mony guid points, but unfortunately they're o' the kind that gang to mak' a hat-rack by-ordinar handy."

"Eh, Robert Doo," and he lauched heartily.

"Lovan, man, you will hae your bit joke, but, truly noo, and as sure as you're a decent, honourable man, that beast, as he stauns, is worth the ten pun' ten I'm askin' for him."

"Ten pounds ten shillin's," says I in astonishment, and I looked at him, wonderin' if he was serious. But his mooth was set like a steel trap and his een were like burnt holes

in a blanket. "Ten pounds ten," I repeated slowly. "Dod, man, yin could do a lot wi' that. Is he sound?"

"As sound as ye can expect for the money."

"Imphm—is—is his wind a' richt?"

"Wind! Wind, did ye say? Michty me, Robert Doo, he has lungs like a Shinnel shepherd—Bowlie, my man, staun weel back or he'll blaw off your bonnet. Ay, my good man, and ye consider him dear. Candidly noo, Robert Doo, tell me hoo ye think that."

"Weel, Brecham," says I, "not for one moment wad I hae my opinion pitted against yours. It's your business, horse dealin's your bread and butter, but you're sellin' and I'm buyin', and you and me look on this particular bit o' truck frae, as it were, different stand-points. Now, as an outsider—an outsider, mind you—I wad say that that horse has known affliction. Evidently he's had a lang life; it has been nae bed o' roses to him, and it has been a very serious business wi' him into the bargain. Speakin' noo as a tradesman, I wad say he's decidedly off the plumb; mair

than that, he's badly hashed about the knees and bent in his fore legs. His feet are sairly turned in——"

"Stop, stop noo, Robert Doo—feet turned in, did ye say? Dash it, man, that's his damned pride—it's his breedin', man. Bluid tells in a horse as it does in folk. And bear in mind, my good friend, you're lookin' at him, naked as it were—nocht on him but his halter. See him wi' a nice set o' harness on his back and in the trams o' a smart dogcart, and I tell ye there's not his marra in the shire o' Dumfries, and he's there as he is, and he's yours for ten pun' ten—ten ten, Robert Doo," and he pu'd a corn strae oot o' his coat pocket and chewed the end o't in a determined kind o' way as much as to say, "There, now, I've said my say."

"Well, Brecham," says I, "the beast may be a' ye say o't, but it doesna look it. In ither words, he micht be a guid horse, but nobody wad ken that by lookin' at 'im. I didna think on gaun the length o' ten pounds; in fact, the horse, though dootless worth that to you and maybe ither, is not worth it to me.

But I tell ye what I'll do. I'll gie ye five pounds ten for him, so there noo."

Ben said nocht for a wee, but he looked at me like thunder and chewed most vigorously at the corn strae.

"Bowlie," said he at length, "you've been as lang at the horse trade as I have been, and I ask ye seriously, did ever ye hear sic impudence in a' your life?"

Bowlie shifted from ae bent leg to the ither and clapped the horse on the nose.

"Robert Doo," says he, "you shouldna hae made sic an offer in the puir horse's hearin'. It's an awfu' affront, an' you're makin' a fool o' baith it and Maister Brecham."

"Dod, man, I happened to cast my e'e in the direction o' the horse, and as sure as death it was lookin' at me wi' an expression o' disgust. Then it turned its heid, sorrowfully I thocht, and I'm not very certain, but it seemed to me that it winked at Bowlie and he nodded to it and spat sideways.

Then Brecham took me by the lappell o' my coat. "Robert," says he earnestly, "I'm askin' you ten pun' ten for that horse. Aff

that I've to pay thirty shillin's for a season's grass, five shillin's for shoein' him, and six and six to Bowlie for bringin' him frae Traloss. That leaves me very little, and you've the face to offer me five pun' ten. Lodsake, man, I've sell't a soo for as much as that, and ye wadna compare a soo to a fine upstandin' horse like that. He's tired after his lang walk or I wad mak' Bowlie rin him doon the street to show his action. I havena mu time to waste wi' ye, so ye must mak' up your mind and mak' me a reasonable offer, for I've another customer in my e'e for him if you and me dinna agree. But look here noo, look here, man, gimme your haun—one minute, your haun, we'll say eicht pun' ten—eicht ten, Robert Doo—think what I'm sayin'—eicht ten, and hae dune wi' it," and he dumped his ash-plant on the ground to clench the bargain.

Dod, man, someway I had got it into my heid that Ben, Bowlie, and the horse were a' in league against me, and the mair I thocht o't the mair determined was I to stick to my offer. "No, no, Brecham," says I, "not one

penny mair than five pounds ten; that's my figure, and I'll not budge."

A wheen weans had been playin' tig-tow roon the trees, but when they saw there was a ploy on they stopped their game and a' gathered roon. The neibors too were a' oot at their doors by this time, and I took very unkindly to all the hillgill and commotion, but the publicity was makin' Brecham a man o' importance, and he relished it and made the most of it, for he took a short-stem'd cutty pipe oot o' his waistcoat pocket and deliberately filled it, a' the time movin' his lips and noddin' his heid up and doon as much as to say, "Weel, weel, this beats cockfightin'—if ever I heard the like o't."

I don't know hoo mony matches he wasted ower the lightin' o' that pipe. He wad spark yin, and the time it was burnin' he wad be lookin' at the horse and then at me and then at the horse again. By this time the match wad be fizzlin' oot and burnin' his fingers. Then he wad spark anither, and anither, and the same performance went on. At last he drew reek, and then says he, "Weel, Robert, if

that's your last word there's nae use hagglin' mair. Bowlie, juist tak' Plunger doon to my stable. Rub him weel doon and gie him a guid feed o' corn, and I'll tak' him the morn to yin wha kens and appreciates a guid beast."

Bowlie made great pretence o' movin' away, and I said guid-nicht and was makin' to gang into the hoose when a sudden thoct seemed to strike Ben.

"One moment, Robert," says he. "Eh—what was your offer again?"

"Five pounds ten shillin's," says I, frae the doorstep.

"Ay, and I said eicht ten. Imphm! Eh—Bowlie, wait a moment. Weel, Robert, we'll split the difference—so be it at seven pun'; there, noo, your haun on it, Robert.—Bowlie, tak' Plunger roon to Maister Doo's stable. We'll settle this inside."

Dod, he followed me into the kitchen and, sittin' on the corner o' the table, he argy-bargied away, but a' to no purpose, and half an oor later he left my door wi' five pound notes and ten single shillin's in his pocket, and Plunger was mine.

CHAPTER VII

I STARTED to tell you aboot the buyin' o' that horse. I hae done so, and, gall and wormwood though it be to me, I'll not shrink from tellin' you the sequel, and of the shameful way that Brecham and Bowlie took the advantage of my simplicity and how they led me to the fair.

It's not for me to unmask rascality or to pass judgment thereon. Neither is it my nature to cry oot for brunt fingers when I willingly put my haun in the fire. I'll mak' no comment by way o' criticising Brecham and Bowlie's conduct. I'll simply tell my story and leave you to judge between us and to say if I was justified in addin' "Amen" to Spurgeon's last surprise.

Weel, my 'prentice at that time was wee Tam Walker, son o' "Tattie" Walker, the cairter. A fell gleg boy he was, and as he had been a' his life used wi' horses at hame, and for

a shillin' extra o' wages, he willingly undertook the lookin' after o' Plunger.

I saw to the beast's wants the first nicht mysel', suppered it on a bran mash and bedded it wi' clean strae, and after arrangin' wi' Tam to see him fed and harnassed early the next mornin' I retired for the nicht wi' the proud, cantie feelin' that at last I had a horse o' my ain, and that noo I could, as it were, crack my whip wi' the best in the land.

I was lang, lang o' sleepin', for no sooner was my heid on the pillow than I began to plan drivin' excursions ower a' the country wi' Grizzly. Barjarg, of coorse, was to be oor first jaunt, and I had a beautiful vision o' the pair o' us drivin' serenely through the Keir, me sittin' straight up in my seat wi' my elbo's close to my side, and Grizzly, wi' a proud, flushed face, cooryin' beside me. And then on arrivin' at Barjarg, at her auld freen Mrs. Dempster's door I wad jump doon and lift her oot as I had done in the auld, auld days, and—oh, man, nae wonder I didna sleep. Then I thocht how nice it wad be drivin' up the Castle road to my work, wi' wee Tam

handlin' the reins and nocht for me to do but to watch the bonnie mornin' sunshine lyin' on the Tibbers holm and to listen to the bummin' o' the bees and the mornin' sang o' the lark and the lintie. To sit in my ain trap behin' my ain horse, on the road to a guid-payin' job and in the balmy caller air o' a summer mornin', what could be nicer? Dod, man, I fell asleep wi' sic thochts runnin' riot in my brain, and I dreamed I was drivin' three spankin' white horses yoket to a golden chariot. Grizzy was at my side wi' her Paisley shawl on, and the road we were skimmin' along was by-ordinar familiar, for it was the lang stretch that leads through the Keir to Barjarg, and strange, man, it was covered wi' frost-crusted snaw, as it was in that never-to-be-forgotten mornin' o' lang ago, and it lay before us skinklin' like diamonds and pearls in the rays o' a wintry sun. Ay, man, but that was juist a dream.

Next mornin' when I was sittin' at my breakfast wee Tam chappet at the back kitchen door. I gaed oot and there he was standin' wi' starin' een and a face as white as a sheet.

"What's wrang wi' ye, Tamie?" says I.

"There's nocht wrang wi' me, but there's surely something wrang wi' the horse, for he's leanin' up against the wa' and I canna get the harness on."

My heart seemed to gang doon to my buits, and wi' a presentiment o' comin' troubles I followed him into the stable.

Dod, the boy was quite richt. Plunger was leanin' against the wa', and his heid was hingin' doon almost to his feet. I never saw sic a livin' picter o' despair. It seemed a cryin' shame to disturb him, but something had to be done, and by oor united efforts in the way o' shovin' and haudin' up we got him upright on his legs, and in a jiffy the harness to the last strap was on and properly adjusted. It took a good deal o' coaxin' and "chick chickin'" to get him oot o' the stable. I never saw beast or body so unwillin' to tackle a day's wark, but it's wonderfu' what patience and a guid whip-shank will do, and aboot half-past six Tamie and me were ready to set oot for the Sweetbit. Harness didna improve Plunger. No. Dod, he was even mair wae-

some lookin' in the mornin' than he was the nicht before, and it began to dawn upon me that even at five pounds ten he wasna what yin micht ca' a bargain. Wee Tamie didna say much, but aince or twice he gaed abint the cairt—that was before we started, and I micht be wrang, but it struck me he was laughin'. Weel, Tamie got in first, and when I was puttin' my foot on the step I looked up and, says I, "Noo, my wee man, drive canny to start wi'. It's no guid for a beast to be ower hard ca'd so soon after its breakfast."

"A' richt," says Tamie, and we made a start at a walkin'-pace.

When we got the length o' the Cross I remarked to him that there were degrees o' canniness, and that he micht put Plunger away at a bit trot. But Plunger was evidently enjoyin' his walk and wasna to be hurried, and in spite o' Tamie's gentle suasion in the form o' rein tuggin' and whip crackin' he continued his dauner at what yin micht ca' a funeral step.

"Wait till I get him off the street," says

Tamie. "I'll bet a pound I'll make him trot roon the Cundy road."

Dod, man, the boy was richt; he did begin to jog when we got roon the turn, but when he did so his tongue began to hing oot juist like a red hanky oot o' your pocket, and his tail bobbit up and doon wi' surprisin' regularity.

He slowed doon a wee when we got near Holmhill, and cam' to a dead stop at the brewery. Noo it was early mornin'. Jeems M'Caig, the brewer, was in his sleepin' bed in Thornhill, the brewery gates were a' shut, barred, and locket, so that a stoppage there at this particular time was the very heicht o' nonsense.

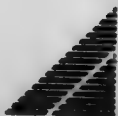
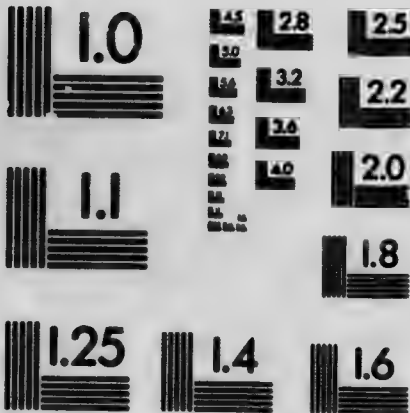
We baith sat still for a wee lookin' at Plunger and wonderin' what was likely to be botherin' his mind. Then wee Tam said that maybe there was a stane in his hoof, which I thoct not unlikely, as when we were passin' the Cundy I noticed his heid as weel as his tail was bobbin', so I held the reins till Tam investigated.

After a deal o' trouble he got yin o' its fore feet off the grun', but, mighty me, he nearly coupet the whole concern. A beast



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that's no very steady on four legs mak's a puir show at stability on three, so I told Tamie to let weel-do alane and to come into the trap again. Weel, it must have been a rest Plunger wanted, for all of a sudden he started off walkin' again. He meandered along as far as the Castle road-end, durin' which nothing by-ordinar occurred, except that in spite o' Tamie he walked deliberately frae the middle o' the road to the side and sniffed along the top o' a bing o' nappet stanes in a stane magazine.

"Tamie, my wee man," says I, "ye maun be firm. Never allow a horse to tak' liberties o' that kind. Assert yoursel' like a man and——"

"Maybe he was lookin' for a water trough," says Tamie, and he girmed and laughed.

"But he shouldna be lookin' for water troughs; he should be lookin' for the Sweetbit, so on, Tamie, on."

Boys, oh, boys, I'll never forget that drive as long as I live. Drive, did I say? Faith, it wasna a drive; it was a walk, and a workin' walk at that, for Tamie and me had to get oot and shove up a' the braes, and between shovin'

uphill and steadyin' him gaun doonhill I was fit to drap ere I was half-way to oor destination. What a difference between the anticipation and the realisation. I had no eyes for the beautiful mornin' sunshine lyin' on the Tibbers holm, no ears for the bummin' o' the bees, and the sang o' the lark and the lintie. Faith no. When my eyes werena restin' on the dusty hind-door o' the cairt they were fixed wi' concern and alarm on a bobbin' heid and tail and a lang lollin' tongue, and the only soon' that fell on my ears was the snortin' and roarin' o' that puir auld forfaughten patriarch. And his name was Plunger. O Lord, did ye ever ken the like o't! If he stopped aince he stopped a hundred times between the castle road end and the Tibbers. We were oot and in, and in and oot, I canna tell ye hoo often, and if I had been a swearin' man, as ye ken I'm no', my chance o' handlin' a harp wad surely have been destroyed for ever. Really, it was the most 'ryin' mornin's wark I had set my face to for mony a day, and I wasna in a very happy frame o' mind when, aboot nine o'clock, and after bein' ower twae

'oors on the road, we reached the top o' the Plummery brae. Tamie and me had been shovin' behin' for about a mile, and I was takin' a rest and wipin' my perspirin' face when John Paiterson, the roadman, appeared on the scene.

John's a droll man—has been s' his days, and he has an awfu' lot o' what I wad ca' impiddent humour aboot him.

A' the time he was speirin' me aboot his auld Thornhill freens he was eyein' Plunger and the cairt and wee Tamie and me—takin' us a' in, as it were, and smirkin' and smilin' complacently to himsel' every noo and again. Much as I wanted to be away frae John I couldna get, for Plunger wadna "plunge," and I couldna gang withoot him. The crack wore oot, but the smilin' continued abominably, till I could stand it no longer.

"John," says I, as ca'mly as I could, for 'od, man, I was angry by this time, "it's maybe no business o' mine, but I wad gie a sixpence to ken what you're lauchin' at."

"Ay," says John, surprised like.

"Yes," says I.

"Oh," says he, "it's nocht very much."

"But, John," says I warmly, "it's botherin' me; oot wi't, and let me lauch wi' ye."

"Weel, Robert," says he, "the truth is, I was juist thinkin' that that turnoot o' yours wad mak' a capital guid frontispiece for the Lamentations o' Jeremiah."

Dod, man, I went ower to where John was staunin', and after surveyin' Plunger from that standpoint I admitted he micht be richt. "But, man, John," says I, "if you had been ta'en in wi' this as I have been, ye wadna be laughin'—you wad be greetin', ay, and maybe blaspheming, and considerin' the provocation I wadna wonder if it wasna marked in the Great Book against ye."

Weel, by-times we got on the way again, and we walked the level bit o' road to near the Mains without mishap. But the Mains Brae was the last straw to Plunger. The spirit micht hae been willin', but the flesh was weak—desperate weak. We could hardly keep him on his feet, and when we reached the top he completely collapsed. Whether he fell doon, or sat doon, I canna say, but he was

lyin' on twae broken shafts when wee Ned Girner cam' oot at the Kennels gate. It's pairt o' his duty to bay, kill, and boil doon for the dogs' feedin' ony auld yaulds that are past workin', and knowin' this, I imagined there was a hungry, greedy look in Girner's e'e when he approached the prostrate Plunger.

"Weel, weel, Maister Doo," says he, "it's very very few that come to me wi' their harness on. How d'ye intend gettin' your trap back to Thornhill?"

I looked at Girner in blank astonishment. "What d'ye mean?" says I.

"Mean," says he. "Are ye no' bringin' this horse to the dogs?"

"No," says I, wi' some birr; "I was on my way to the Sweetbit."

"There's nae knackary at the Sweetbit," says he. "Mair than that, I had as guid as bocht this same horse for five-and-twenty shillin's frae the farmer o' Honeybrae, nae faurer gane than the day before yesterday, but the bargain was cried off at the last minute because Brecham, the Thornhill dealer, offered five shillin's mair."

A cauld sweat broke oot on me, and wi' a sinkin' hert I saw through the whole ploy. Five pounds ten shillin's I had payed for what cost Brecham one pound ten. Oh, what a blackguard he was! Oh, what a simpleton I had been! I had played the wise man in the kittleist and quirkiest trade in the world, and had been humbled and humiliated by the biggest rogue that ever handled an ashplant.

I sent wee Tamie away on by himsel'. Then I had a quiet word wi' Girner, the ootcome o' which was that when "Plunger" was coaxed to his feet he was quietly led into the Kennels, and I followed Tamie on my feet and wi' a chastened hert to the Sweetbit about an 'oor later.

I don't know what share o' the plunder fell to Bowlie, but somebody told me that he got a pair o' new buits and had been blind to the world for three days on end. As for Brecham, puir man, I never met him face to face thereafter, for he contracted pneumonia, and got a very sudden call. The cutest dealer or trucker in the world has no chance wi' Death. This has been, and ever will be, a "one man"

bargain, and tho' Brecham fought weel, and tried his best, he had to give in. I often wondered if the soople trick he had played me was botherin' his mind at the lang hinner-end as much as it was botherin' mine, but I forgave him, as I trust he was by a higher power. I attended his funeral as if nocht had happened, and that day when we were takin' him slowly through the Gill the hope was strong within me that Spurgeon's third and biggest surprise had been Brecham's after a'.

CHAPTER VIII

DOUGLAS, the barber, and me were staunin' ca'in' the crack ae mornin'—dod, it's a lang time since, but I mind o't weel—when the laird o' Riddins cam' daunerin' along the street, wi' his thoom in his oxter, and says he, when he cam' up, "Douglas, can ye tell me whae it was that built Bonniton's corner shop?"

Douglas thocht for a minute. "It was—let me think, noo," said he; "it was Joseph Cook, wasn't it, Robert?"

"It was," says I; "and I should ken for I was hewin' wi'm at the time."

"Ay, man," says Riddins, "was it Joseph Cook? I'm surprised to ken that. I aye thocht Joseph made a better job than that, for I seldom come into Thornhill but I see never less than half a dozen folk hae lin' it up." He pursed his lips, shook his heid sideways, and lookin' up through his double lens

specs, he says, "Man, man, Douglas, when will thae lazy deevils find oot that they'll never get on by hangin' on?"

Ay, Douglas has gone, Riddins has gone, and mony, mony mair since that observe was made. But I've never forgotten it. It has stuck to me like a burr to a sheep's back, and candidly I tell ye that it, maybe mair than ocht else, ettled me on to start on my ain accoont. "Robert," I've often said to mysel', "dinna be a hanger-on; be a hinger-in," and a hinger-in I've been. Of course I admit fortune's wheel hasna aye been gaun roon in my favour; but, in the shadows, Grizzy and me hae aye plodded on, settin' a stout hert to a stey; ye, carefu' o' what was comin' in, an' ten times mair carefu' o' what was gaun oot. And dod, man, that's the secret o' the whole affair. When times are bad, keep your e'e on the ootgauns, and when times are guid it'll come natural to ye. I've often remarked to Grizzy that we've been carefu' withoot bein' mean, and open-handed withoot bein' extravagant. I've a knocker on my door, "God bless our home" on the fender, an oil-paintin' o'

Thornhill Cross abune the chest o' drawers in the parlour, and Venetian blinds on the twae front windows. What think ye o' that? Mind you, I'm no' boastin'. Ah no. D'ye ken this, often when I'm sittin' o' a forenicht wi' my slippered feet on the hudd I look roon about me, and when I see the china dogs on the mantelpiece, the beautiful flo'ers made o' wax and covered wi' a bell glass on the table, the roses galore on the counterpane o' the kitchen bed, twae 'hind hams and a shooder on the balks, and Grizzy sittin' wi' a Shetland shawl on her back makin' an antimacassar—oh, loah—as I've said before, I juist shut my een and ask the Lord to keep me humble.

There's ae thing about Grizzy an' me, we've no' been jumpers, we've been creepers. Ocht by-ordinar we got for the hoose was bocht arter great deliberation, an' wi' the cash in oor haun. And we've aye kept a quiet sough. We've never let on we were better off than we were—juist wrocht away, gain' oursels nae airs, and no' raxin' sae far ben but we could draw back. Twice I was sae tempted to blaw, and twice only. Yin o' the times was

when Grizzy got her new mangle, and the ither was when my signboard was put up at th yairdgate—

ROBERT DOO

MASON.

Man, it was painted maist beautifu', and varnished up to the nines. The letters were as strecht up as a die, and, man, the first time I saw't, the sun was shinin' on't, makin' it skinkle like a kittlin's e'e, and, as sure as death, I put my hat to the side, stuck oot my chest, and hoasted like the deacon. But it was only for a minute. "Robert," says I to mysel', "coont ten and bear in mind ye're in moleskins," and I subsided before I got the length o' five.

Of course, there are differences o' folk. There's Curdie Callander, the joiner, noo, he's dune weel, I understaun, and if his heid disna get ower big for his bonnet I've nae doot he'll gang far. He flew laigh to begin wi'; but lately I've seen signs o' "the big yin" peepin' oot, an' if Curdie tak's my advice he'll ca' canny. They tell it's the wife wha has the big ideas, and it's weel eneuch kenned that, birky tho' he be, he's juist like

a bit o' putty in her hauns. No lang after he started for himsel' he got a decent payin' job, and she bocht yin o' thae whatnot things to staun in a corner o' her parlour. Soon after she bocht a lookin'-glass for abune the mantel-piece, and a carpet for the floor, and the ither day she further gane, what think ye she got? A piano, sir, fac' as death. It cam' on the lorry, and it took six men to lift it in. She had to tak' doon the bed in the parlour to gie it room to staun, and where her puir boys are sleepin' now, guidness only kens.

Curdie and me foregathered the ither nicht at the heid o' the Gill, and after settlin' the Home Rule questie and the Insurance Bill and cursin' the spiket railings roon the auld Cross, we got into what yin might ca' personal grips, and we dauner'd quietly up the Auld Street, cracking aboot the different jobs we had baith in haun, and hoo they were likely to turn oot.

When we landed opposite his door he wad hae me in, richt reason or nane, so in we gaed, richt ben to the parlour wi' the new plenishin's. I took off my bonnet, of course, but Curdie keepit his on, and blew reek through his pipe

most awfu', glintin' a' the time frae ae thing an' anither to me, no speakin', ye ken, but lookin' as if he was sayin', "What think ye o' that lookin'-glass, noo, Doo?" and "D'ye ken a piano when ye see yin?" Dod, man, he appeared to me to swell visibly wi' every puff, and after a wee, says he, "Imphm—ch—ye'll be thinkin' that profits'll no' hide, Robert."

Man, I didna let on that I was noticin' ocht oot o' the ordinary in the room, and says I, quite innocently, "No, Curdie, I wasna thinkin' ocht o' the kind. Why are ye askin'?"

"Hoch, well, b'gum," says he, "hae ye no' een in your heid? Look aboot ye. There are few parlours buskit like this in Thornhill, I tell ye; but mind ye, Robert, I'm no' boastin', or showin' off my gear in a chawsome way, ye ken. Na, na—imphm. Waxcloth was guid enough aince on a time, but it has a cauld feel to the feet. What think ye o' that carpet, noo? Hoo muckle d'ye think that cost?"

"Man, Curdie," says I, "I'm no', as ye ken, in the carpet line. Grizzy, I'se warrant, could tell ye to a hapenny, but frae the look o't I wad say—oh, thirty pounds, maybe—ch?"

"Oh, Moses!" says he, "thir'y poun', gie's a chance, noo, Robert Doo. Great Cæsar, man—thirty poun'; and me juist a joiner."

"Weel, weel," says I, "we'll say thirty bob. Is that ony nearer't?"

Man, he lookit at me wi' what my freen Corson, the sclater, ca's a look o' disdain. He didna answer me, but he blew pipe reek like mad. In a wee while, says he—

"Man, Robert, it's awfu' nice to hae a guid lookin'-glass in the hoose. It took me a' my time to shed my hair in the auld yin we used to hae, so we took doon the picture o' John Knox frae abune the mantelpiece and fixed that up—best quality, bevel-edged, quarter plate. It's a decided change for the better. I never liked that photograph o' Knox, onyway. John's beard was aye ower lang to be bonnie."

"Imphm," says I, "a lookin'-glass wi' weel-faurt folk is muckle in demand, and ye'll need it aften, Curdie; but what's that in the corner there, wi' the jugs on't?"

"Oh," says he, "that's what they ca' a whatnut. It's a shogly-lookin' thing, I admit, but it's handy, and Mirren tells me it's the

correct thing to hae. And, of course, ye'll ken what that is," pointin' to the piano.

Man, I kenned fine what it was, but I looked surprised like. "Gosh," says I, "that's a braw thing, noo, bonnie marks on the wood-wark—walnut, I should say. Does it tak' up much room when it's laid out?"

"Laid out!" says Curdie, in astonishment. "Laid out! in the name o' wonder what dae ye think it is?"

"A foldin'-doon bed," says I.

"Oh, Robert Doo, where were ye brocht up?" and Curdie laughed in a kind o' superior way. "That, man, is a piano for playin' music, ye ken. It's an auld sayin' that music in the hame mak's hame happy, an' we're a' seik o' the accordion. Mirren, the wife, has lang tell't me she was born wi' piano fingers, and as the Toonheid job turned out better than I expected, I gied in to her an' bocht this, and there it sits. Imphm! I've mair mercies than I deserve, certainly mair than I expected, and I've only ae regret, and it is that my mither, puir body, wasna spared to see this parlour."

Mirren's piano fingers took my fancy. Her

mither had tarry fingers, and as I sat there it flashed through my mind that aince the auld yin ran a narrow shave o' the jail for liftin' a set o' fire-irons at a roup. But not a word did I say. I got up and examined it, head, tail, and near and aff side. "It's a beautifu' affair, Curdie," says I, "a beautifu' affair a'the-gither; but dod, man, where's the handle?"

"Handle!" says Curdie, and he took the pipe frae between his teeth. "Handle! And what micht ye want wi' a handle, noo, Robert?"

"To caa' the music roon," says I.

"To caa' your grannie—— Dash ye, ye micht as weel speir where the monkey is. This is no' a hurdy-gurdy; this is a piano. It's wrocht here," and he lifted the lid and tum-tummed aince or twice. "I'm nae great haun at it masel'," says he, "but Mirren can dirl't up. Wad ye like to hear her?"

I tell't him it wad afford me the greatest o' pleasure. So up he got aff the table, where he had been sittin', and, openin' the door, he cries, "Mirren, woman, ca'way ben here and gie's a tune on the piano. I've an auld freen here wha's terrible keen on music."

I could gather frae the noise ben the hoose that Mirren had something else to do than play a piano, an' in nae very choice words she cried to Curdie to that effect, but he wadna be said nay, and in a wee, ben she cam' wi' ae wean in her airms and anither hingin' on by her frock.

She's a lang, tankard-backit, cauld-wamed kind o' a woman is Mirren, with a flat chest, sleekit black hair, and a sherp, sallow face that wad shell peas. She wasna overly weel pleased to see me, I could judge, or raither, I should say, she would hae been better pleased to see me in ither circumstances, for the room was like as if it had been stirred wi' a stick and the bairns' faces werena overly clean.

"Oh, Maister Doo, it's you, is it?" says she, as she wipet her face wi' her apron. "Ye do tak' me by surprise. Had I kenned ye were comin' I wad hae been prepared for ye."

"Hauch," says Curdie, "you're prepared eneuch; sit down here and gie us 'Duncan Gray.' Maister Doo's juist deein' to hear a piano."

"Curd," says she emphatically, "are ye in

your richt mind ? Hoo can ye ask me to play before a musicianer like Maister Doo ? ”

“ Maister Doo’s nae musicianer, woman,” says Curdie, “ or he wad hae kenned the difference between a piano and a foldin’-doon bed. C’way like a lass, noo.”

“ Were you no’ in the Thornhill brass baun aince on a time, Maister Doo ? ” asks Mirren, wi’ her heid to the side like a hen drinkin’ water.

“ No,” says I, “ I was not, Mrs. Callander ; but my cousin, Weelum Ritchie, played the big drum, and my next-door neibor that was, Dempster the plumber, played the trombone. That’s a’ the connection I had wi’ the baun.”

“ Imphm ! I aye thocht ye were musically inclined noo,” says she. “ I dinna care aboot playin’ before critics, as I’m no’ sae far up as I micht hae been had I ta’en mamma’s advice and watched the organist tichter.”

Ma that was an awfu’ guid yin. Her mamma, as she ca’d her—that was tarry-fingered Jean MacRobbie—took in laundry wark, and dootless stairched the organist’s shirts, but for that connection had nae mair

to do wi' the organist than I had. But I said nocht, of course.

"Come on noo, Mirren," pleaded Curdie, and Mirren, assured o' her audience, sat doon wi' the bairn on her knee and played wi' her richt haun what dootless was "Duncan Gray," but I canna tell for certain.

"Can ye no' bang't wi' baith hauns ?" asked Curdie encouragingly, when she had finished.

"Hoo can I dae that wi' the wean on my knee ?" she asked ower her shooder.

"Oh, I'll tak' the wean," says Curdie, suitin' the action to the word, "and into your wark, Mirren. Go for its wee black teeth as weel as its white yins, and oot wi' the 'Keel Row,' like a lass."

Boys, oh, boys ! what a din. It might, or it might no', be the "Keel Row" ; but it was a row, maybe the damndest row I ever heard in a' my life. And she went for it, mind you, quite satisfied wi' hersel', and Curdie was enjoyin't, for he sat like a Merry Andra, jinkin' the wean on his knee to the lilt o' the music, and jerkin' his heid frae ae side to the ither, keepin' time to the tune.

When she finished the "Row" she started a hymn, and the wean began to greet and the cat slid cannily oot o' the room. I wished I could hae followed the cat, but I had to sit through the performance o' some ither things. When she was finished she turns roon, and, says she, "Has Mistres' Doo a piano?"

"No," says I, "but she's got a fell guid-gaun mangle."

"Oh!" says she, and she lengthened oot her lang thin neck and snappit her b'low jaw juist like a dummy figger a ventriloquist had in a show I aince saw in the Auld Street.

"Man, Robert, isn't it a fine thing, music?" says Curdie. "Get a piano, man. What's the guid o' siller if ye dinna mak' use o't? But maybe Mrs. Doo hasna got piano fingers?"

I said I didna ken aboot piano fingers, but for ordinar everyday wark she had ten o' the very best I ever saw on twae hauns.

And that nicht when I got hame Grizzy was sittin' by the fireside on the auld low nursin' chair busied on a stockin' for hersel'. I sat doon, and in quietness watched her for a wee. Then I hirseled my chair nearer her, and, says

I, "Grizzy, lass, did onybody ever tell ye that ye had piano fingers?"

She stoppit knittin' for a wee, and giein' a wee bit lauch as she lookit at her haun, she said, "No, I dinna think I ever got that said to me. Why are ye askin'?"

I didna tell her, but I took her bit shilpit, wrinkled haun in mine, and, says I, "Grizzy, my lass, it was a gey bonnie plump bit haun that when first I kissed it, and aft'r three-and-fifty years thegither I kiss it again, auld tho' it be, wi' a thoosand times mair love and reverence noo than then."

She didna say muckle—Grizzy never does—but she sat for a wee while after I had gaen to my bed, lookin' into the fire, and I kenned her thochts were away in auld Barjarg times, and when she raise to blaw oot the cannell there was a wee bit tear-drap on her cheek and a smile on her auld sweet face which made it positeevely beautiful to me.

CHAPTER IX

THERE was naeboddy to be seen when I gaed into the druggist's shop, so I rappit wi' the bottom o' the bottle on the counter. A chubby-faced boy keekit by the side o' some big blue bottles and said, "Well ?"

"No, I'm no' well," says I, "or I wadna be here. Gie's a pennyworth o' castor oil, and dinna scrimp the measure."

The heid disappeared, and I heard him gaun away ben to the back shop. After a wee while he cam' oot. "Wad paraffin oil dae ?" he asked. "It's the only oil bottle I can see that's labelled."

"No," says I, "paraffin'll no' dae. Where's your maister ?"

"He's at the Tournament."

"The what ?" says I.

"The Boolin' Tournament," says he ; "but I had to rin doon to the Green for him if he

was wanted, and," he added, "I've run the soles off my buits thae last twae days. It's a trot, trot on."

"Aweel," says I, "there's the bottle. I'm gaun doon the street to the tailor's for my new trousers, so I'll ca' for the oil on the bygaun."

When I got to the tailor's door I juist met my man wi' a white waistcoat on and a kind o' holiday look aboot him. Dod, man, he took speech in haun juist at aince. "Eh, ay, ye'll be expectin' your trousers some day next week, Maister Doo," says he.

"Next week!" says I. "Man, ye tell't me last Friday they wad be ready for me the day, an' faith it's no' oot o' time, for I'm sairly needin' them."

He scartit his pow for a minute. "Ay—weel, I daursay that's richt enough; but dod, man, I've been sae busy lately that I hardly ken where to turn. Mournings, Maister Doo—mournings maun be attended to first, ye ken. But, depend on't, ye'll get your trousers this day week for certain." An' wi' that he waved his haun and was off doon the street like a blue-bucket flea.

He had slipped off juist like a knotless thread, an' I stood wonderin' where to gang or what to do, when the "feel" o' a mutchkin bottle in my oxter pouch brocht me "to," as it were; so I dauner'd quietly doon the stree' to the grocer's to get some boiled ham. I had kenned Jeems Hyslop's faither for year and had aye got what little boiled ham I had frae him; so oot o' respect for his faither's memory I liket to ca' the crack for a wee noo and again; so, as I said, in I goes.

"Wae 'prentice boys were killin' wasps in the inside o' the window, and when I rappit on the counter I was tell't to haud on, as they were expectin' a bumbee in a minute or twae, and I wad see some fun.

Says I, "I presume your maister's no' in."

"You're richt the very first guess," says the youngest yin, as he flisket at a wasp wi' the end o' his apron. "Ye'll see him on the Green. He's at the Tournament, but if you're no' in a hurry, tak' a chair, and you'll see him at shuttin' time."

I was juist gaun to say something cuttin' to him when he lurched up against a wheen

pasteboard boxes o' stairch and sat doon gey heavy on a dizzen o' them, makin' the stoorie stairch skail in a' airts; so, thinks I, my boy, ye've plenty to think aboot, and oot I goes.

I stood at the edge o' the siver for a minute, wunerin' if a' the Thornhill folk had gaen boolin' c'aft, and thinkin' hoo times and men were changed. Speakin' for mysel', I wad never allo' ocht to interfere wi' my business. "Wark first and plesure after" has aye been my motto; and it juist made me ravin' mad to think of the valuable time that was bein' wasted on that Boolin' Green. No' like me, thinks I, wi' baith hauns fu'—makin' hay as lang as the sun shines; and, my guidness, by the same token, thinks I, I maun get some Portland cement when I'm this length, so that I can start to Wullie Weir's kitchen range i' the afternuin.

I juist turned to see frae the post-office clock what time o' day it was when a heavy haun was clappit on my shooder wi' a richt guid will. "Shankland," says I, as I rubbed my rheumatic airm and lookit into a cheery face, "if your pouch was as heavy as your

haun ye wad be a second Carnegie. I see you've got a gey jaunty strae hat on. Where are ye off to?"

"Off to!" says John in surprise. "Why should you ask? Have ye not heard, has it not been told to you, that a Bowling Tournament is in progress on the Bowling Green? Verily, the news has been told in Gath and published on the streets of Askelon; and yet you ask me, 'Where goest thou?' Journey with me, my worthy friend, to the scene of the conflict." And wi' that he linkit his airm thro' mine and hauled me doon the Gill to the Boolin' Green.

My word, what an eye-opener I got! The feck o' Thornhill was there, auld an' young, married an' single—some sittin' idle-like roon aboot and others strippit to the shirt chasin' their bit bools frae ae end o' the green to the ither, and a' despera'e anxious to pit them as near as possible to a wee white chuckie yin no' near sae big as the yins they were playin' wi'.

Man, I hadna stood for a minute when I spotted Jake Clauchrie stanin' gey official

like wi' a white caird in his haun. I had been tryin' a' week to see him aboot some wark, but was tell't he wasna at hame; so, no' wantin' to miss sic a guid chance o' speakin' wi' him, I cried oot, "Hey, Jake, what aboot thae loose sclates on the Museum roof?" Man, he put ae foot afore the ither, lookit sideways at me wi' his chin in the air like a hen listenin' for thunder. "Great Criffens," says he, after eyein' me for a minute as if he could hae eaten me, "have ye no' mair sense than to come doon here and talk to me aboot sclates? And, mair than that, what the deevil d'ye mean by ca'in' me 'Jake' afore a' the folk? Are ye no' aware I'm an official and on the committee?" Wi' that he turned his back to me, marked something doon on his wee white caird, and gaed away up to the ither en'. Dod, thinks I, wi' everybody except mysel' wark and business is oot o' the question sae lang as the boolin' is on; so I jaist sat doon. There was nae back to the seat, but a bike o' wasps aboot a yaird to the rear made yin sit strecht up and expectant. I was sittin' atween oor twae local druggists: yin smelt o'

liquorice, the ither o' senna; an' after sittin' in sic a druggy atmosphere for an oor or twae I thocht I wadna mind ca'in' for my bottle on the bygaun.

I noticed, sittin' roon aboot, a guid wheen folk I had aye considered eident and intelligent, and I couldna but wonder what they saw in a game o' bools to attract their interest and keep their mind aff their wark. I tried to get to the bottom o'd; but every yin was ower intent on watchin' the boolers to speak to me, so, havin' paid my gate money, and my pipe bein' in guid-gaun order, I juist fired it up and settled doon to watch the twae men playin' in the rink afore me. Yin o' them—a Thornhill man—I kenned, of course; the ither, I didna. The yin I didna ken had on a green hat, and was strippit to the shirt, an' the way he jouket an' jumped was maist extr'ordinar. I noticed he generally played his bool first, an' after he had sent it away he ran after't, pressin' his hauns, prayin'-like, jerkin' his knees an' swayin' to the side he wanted his bool to gang to. Sometimes he ran in front o't, lickin' it a' to sticks, and,

rushin' into anither rink a'thegither, he made a kin' o' a half-circle and banged into the green bank, lookin' roon an' watchin' his bool as if he wad twist its neck and kick it into kingdom come if it didna do exactly as he wanted it. Then he wad cry, "Whaur ye gaun, ye idiot? Bend in time; noo kiss it, my herty; turn the richt way noo, an' cuddle doon like a dearie. Ay, ay." Then, when it had dune juist what he had wanted, he took off his green hat, stappit the back o' his shirt doon the backband o' his trousers, drew his haun adoon his breist as if to smooth his ruffles doon, and lookit up the rink to his neibor as much as to say, "Tak' your change oot o' that yin if ye can."

Next to yin o' my druggist freens was John Waugh, wi' a dust-coat on, slingin' snuff at his waistcoat like auld Jeems Tait.

"Dod, John," says I, "what ca' ye that falla?" Pittem, I thocht John ca'd him; an' faith he was weel named, for he could "pit 'em" there every time. I lookit my watch an' saw it was lang gane dinner-time, but I wasna the least hungry. I thocht o'

Wullie Weir's range, an' my fingers itched to lift a trowel. Then I looked at Pittem. Dod, I couldna get away frae him, so I re-filled my pipe and watched like a gled.

For a wee while, man, ye wad think his haun was gaun oot, and he wad gang away quietly and slowly into the hoose for a minute or twae—maybe to tie his steeker or brush his hair. John Waugh tell't me he was tee-tee, or I wad hae thocht he was havin' a stiff yin to pu' himsel' thegither. Be that as it may, he was a perfect demon to play when he cam' oot, and as the strain o' hangin' aboot afore a' the folk tell't on his neibor, he had things amaist a' his ain way. At ae end, hooever, I thocht he was clean dune. His bools were a' lyin' weel away frae the wee chuckie, an' his opponent's yin lyin' shot, and gey bieldy ahint some ithers. Before playin' his last bool he walk'd doon an' considered the situation, as it were. Bluid's thicker than water, an' I confess I was very anxious to see a Thornhill man gettin' the better o' an oot-sider, and I juist sat ticht, trustin' his deliberations wad end in defeat. Weel, he hitched up

his trousers, tichtened his waist-belt, walked backways half-way up the rink, and stopped for a second. Then on he gaed, crackin' his thooms, an' wi' his heid doon till he got to the wee mat.

Man, the Green was as quiet as a kirkyaird. Not a cheep could be heard. Every man an' every woman roon aboot were feared to breathe. The wind gaed doon a wee, an' the very birds seemed watchin', for they quat their whustlin'. My pipe was oot, an' I was feared to licht it. Then Jeems Cook hoasted. I didna see Jeems, but I wad ken his hoast in a cattle show. That hoast slackened the tension, but it didna disturb Pittem; for doon the rink he sent his bool as strecht as a die. It jinked yin to the richt, juist shaved anither to the left, and cairret afore it in its airms, as it were, the wee white chuck into the open ditch. Everybody on the Green—Thornhill folk and strangers alike—clappet their hauns and hurrayed; an' when he cam' down to the end I raxed ower and cried oot, "Weel dune, Robin Hood; dash it, inan, but you're a beaser." Man, he lookit up, lauchin' at

me and tell't me if he wad only tak' less drink and mair green he wad win the Tournament.

Weel, on gaed the game, and I lost a' sense o' time. I had a comfortable place to sit, a guid-gaun pipe, plenty o' God's ain sunshine, and the very best o' company; an' I was juist enjoyin' mysel' A1 when Wullie Weir's wee boy cam' pushin' his way alang to tell me his mither wanted me to come at aince and sort her kitchen range, as she had got nae hot water for three days. "Hot water!" says I. "What the deevil does she want wi' hot water on a warm day like this? Tell her to gang to the deevil and get hot water." Man, I was awfu' mad at bein' disturbed. Fancy bein' bothered aboot wark when yin had sae much fun for thrippence, an' a dancin', jinkin' sowl makin' fower wudden bools dae exactly as he tell't them. Little wonder I was angry, an' that John Waugh—decent elder—lookit surprised like at me when I said, under my breath and mair to mysel', "To the deevil wi' her and her hot water."

Weel, man, the game proceeded and, believe

me, as sure as the cat's a beast, Pittem got a gliff afore he finished. It may be he had been dancin' better than he had been playin'—I canna tell; I'm a judge o' neither—or maybe he had been keepin' his e'e mair on the bonnie lassies roon aboot than on his neibor's bools; but when the game was cried oot it stood at twenty-twenty. Man, his step altered, an' his shirt stuck oot at his shooder-blade like the breist o' a pouter pigeon; and when his opponent, by a bit o' most beautiful wark, got in a shot which wad mak' him game, he lookit aboot him, crackin' his thooms an' strokin' his shirt front, as much as to say, "Oh, why left I my hame?"

John Shankland whispered in my ear, "Robert, he's in the gall of bitterness." But it wasna for lang. Doon cam' that bool again; but it was the biggest an' the luckiest skemmel he ever made in his life. He was a mile off what he played for, but his bool by accident struck yin that struck oot his neibor's game shot, and there he lay game—game by a fluke. I wonder if he wad tak'

it as a compliment if I tell't him that "Deil's bairns hae their daddy's luck ! "

Weel, after that game was by, I sent a boy up to the baker's for a wheen biscuits, an' I sat on till tea-time watchin' ae rink after anither ; and excitin' wark it was, I tell ye. Noo and then I looket at my freen the tailor, wi' his white waistcoat ; an' it began to dawn on me that if my auld trousers failed me, and the Tournament had to last till the end o' next week, I wad hae to take to my bed. He was sittin' on the bank when I tore mysel' away to my tea, an' I asked him quietly, when gaun by, whae he was waitin' on to dee ; for, says I, " Mournings maun be attended to first." He saw I had tumbled to it, and lauched maist hertily.

Next mornin' I got oot my tools and put some cement in a bag ; but I forgethered wi' Adam Cringeane, the greenkeeper at the Cross, an' the twae o' us dauner'd doon the length o' the Green. I wadna put ff my wark on ony accoont, but I was anxious to see the wasp bike again ; so I sat doon on the seat to watch the wee critters fleein' in and oot.

Then some players started ; and, believe me, I was surprised when I looket at my watch and saw it was half-past twal !

After my dinner I gaed doon to try an' persuade Claucherie to see to the Museum sclates. He was on the Green, I believe, but I didna see him till aboot six o'clock, an' it was nae time then to ask a man to start a day's wark.

Weel, the next day I gaed doon to get a drink o' the Boolin' Green water. I think it's caulder than the rest o' Thornhill water ; but maybe that's only my fancy. Hooever, Samel Morrin and me got on the crack. It started wi' a nasty subject—kitchen ranges—but it feenished wi' the Tournament, and by the time we were at oor second pipe Pittem was on the mat, and that was anither day dune for. But, thank guidness, the Tournament's by noo. Wullie Weir's wife has been withoot hot water for a week gaen last Tuesday. But the day after the morn is Monday, and by eleven o'clock o' that day she'll hae as muckle hot water as wad plot the skin off the biggest swine pig that ever cam' oot o' a soo-crae.

CHAPTER X

Up till this New Year Grizzy and me have aye spent oor holiday wi' Rettie, oor married dochter, in Glasgow, and a very pleasant and enjoyable time we had, wi' ae ploy and anither. But wee Rettie, my granddochter, the stupid wee lass that she is, contracted the fever aboot the middle o' December, and as it was the infectious "scarlet," and as Grizzy had never had it, we werena minded to run in the face o' Providence, as it were, forbye puttin' Rettie to a lot o' trouble on oor accoont, so we juist stayed at hame.

Dod, man, do you know, I never put in such a wearisome day in a' my life as I did that New Year's Monday. The weather was dull and damp, the shops were a' closed, the street had a bleak, deserted appearance, and there was a quiet Sabbath-day air aboot the toon which, on a week-day, had a most depressin' effect.

I walked up and doon the Gill in my guid shepherd tartan trousers wi' the black stripe doon the side, and a bien comfortable top-coat on my back, wheeplin', "Tramp, tramp, tramp, the Boys are Marchin'," stoppin' the music, however, every now and again when my e'e lichted on the closed shops, for dod, man, wi' the shutters up, whistlin' appeared to me almost a profanity and a sin.

Then I hung aboot the Cross for a wee wi' my hauns in my pockets, knockin' ae foot against the ither, and wishin' to goodness we had had, instead o' muggy, miserable weather, a settled doon black frost, so that we could have had a fling at the channel stanes. I had juist feenished countin' three women in the Gill, a dog and five bairns on the Auld Street, and twae craws on Kinnell's tree, when wee Mary Reid, oor neighbour's bit lassie, cam' up to me, and told me I was wanted at hame.

I think a' the weans in oor gate-end were in the kitchen when I gaed in, and Grizzy was busy giein' them their New Year. She was cuttin' up shortbread and currant buns, not in wee bits, but in great big dauds, for

Grizzy, thank the Lord, is yin o' thae kind wha cuts wi' a blunt knife and a big hert. It's cutters and carvers o' this stamp that appeal to bairns and dogs, and though they doubtless have their faults and failin's like ither folks, yet they have, in the hoose and oot the hoose, at hame and abroad, that happy, genial air which bespeaks the sonsie face, the open, lovin' eye, and the ever-ready helpin' haun. Ay, it wad be a happier and a better world if there was mair o' the blunt knife and the big hert, but that has nothing to do wi' my story.

Weel, after the bairns had a' been served wi' something for their pocket and a bit for their haun, and as she was dustin' the currants and crumbs off the kitchen table, Grizzy says—

“By the bye, Robert, Mrs. Hairstanes sent alang word, juist after ye had gane oot, that she would be very pleased if you and me could tak' oor New Year's tea wi' her, and she wants to know, before twelve o'clock, if she can coont on us. Have ye onything else on this afternuin? and if no', d'ye think we micht gang?”

"No, I've nocht to do, nor have I ony place particular to gang this afternuin, but dod, Grizzy, lass," says I, "though she's a decent, weel-meanin' body, Mrs. Hairstanes, she's aye crackin' up the next world, runnin' doon this yin, and lookin' on a' amusements and harmless frivolities wi' such a stern, partial eye that I har'r'v think she's the cheeriest company yin would wish, on a dull, miserable day like this. Mair than that, as you ken, I've no ear for pairties, but it's a time o' givin' and gettin', and if you wad like to go I'll gang wi' ye wi' pleasure."

Weel, to mak' a lang story short, we accepted the invitation, and four o'clock found Grizzy and me in oor Sunday's best at Mrs. Hairstanes' door. Oor hostess met us in the lobby.

"A Happy New Year to ye," says she, "and may ye both be spared through the year that's to come. Mrs. Doo, will ye slip upstairs wi' me and tak' off your clothes? and Mr. Doo, will ye juist step into the back parlour where the rest o' the company is?"

"Right you are, Mrs. Hairstanes," says I,

and as I was hangin' up my topcoat and hat I cries, "And, Grizzy, lass, when it comes to takin' off your clothes, for guid sake use discretion."

Weel, man, in I goes to the back room, and there, sittin' straight up in their chairs, like figures in a waxwork, was a dozen or thereby o' friends and neibors, a' tryin' to hide their hauns and lookin' before them straight into space. Not a word was bein' said, and when I cannily opened the door they a' rose to their feet, standin' to attention, as it were, and their hauns sought the back o' their chairs.

"Dod, freens," says I, "keep your seats; ae chair will serve my purpose," and I sat doon beside Miss M'Bride, wha, wi' a hangin' e'e was lookin' at an auld sampler, framed and stuck on a standard, which was placed between her and the fire to keep the licht frae playin' on her face.

"Ay, ay, Miss M'Bride," says I, wi' a cheery ring in my voice, and pointin' to the figures on the sampler, "nice rosy-cheeked lad and lass, aren't they?"

"Yes, Mr. Doo," says she, lettin' her e'e doon like a shot cushie-doo, "these cheeks are redder than those of the party who worked these stitches, and I've just been thinking that the busy fingers which handled the needle have long, long ago crumbled into dust, and, in some lone churchyard, the grass grows green above their grave. Even a sampler has its lesson, Mr. Doo."

Now, thinks I, this is a damper to start wi', and a cauld stoun gaed doon my spine, and I felt as if a wet cloth had been laid across the sma' o' my back.

"Ay, Miss M'Bride," says I, after thinkin' for a minute, "as you say, even a sampler has its lesson. O' that I have no doubt whatever, but it's a morbid thocht to begin a tea-party wi'. In Ecclesiastes, somewhere aboot the beginning o' the third chapter, if I am not mistaken, the Preacher says there's 'a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.' Kirkyaird reflections are generally not likely to make for gaiety, nor will they improve your appetite. Mrs. Hair-stanes, they tell me, is a capital guid baker o'

soda scones, so if I were you I would forget about the sampler and the crumblin' dust and sic-like, for she'll expect you to do her home-made eatables ample justice."

"Mr. Doo," says she, very decisively, "this is not a day for eating and drinking, this is not a time for laughing and dancing, but for taking stock of ourselves, profiting from experience of the past and making resolutions for the future."

"Weel, weel, my lassie," says I, givin' her a bit clap o' my hand on her shooder, "I'll no' argue-bargy wi' ye on this subject, but I've made a resolution, and it's this, that, after the dram has gane roon', which I ken Maister Hairstanes has in the cupboard, I'll do my best to show Mrs. Hairstanes that her soda scones are appreciated."

Now Wattie Hairstanes was not a tee-totaller as I knew to my cost ony time that him and me gaed across to Penpont to look at work, but on this occasion, when I mentioned the dram in his cupboard, he looked at me as much as to say, "Dash ye, man, you've put your foot in it." Then I remembered there

was an election o' elders on, and that Wattie was in the runnin', and consequently no tastin', and, dagont, this was another stoun, and I felt as if everything was slippin' away frae me. I was juist beginnin' to wonder whether the beverage would be raspberry wine or ginger cordial, when the door opened and Mrs. Hairstanes and Grizzy steppet in. Man, I never saw Mrs. Hairstanes lookin' better. She was a wee bit flushed like, as whae wadna be wi' company in their hoose, but, a' the same, she was as composed and collected as an auctioneer, for after standin' in the middle o' the room and countin' the folk off on her fingers she st' as quietly as a corp's sister, "We're a' hoo, freens, so c'way to your tea."

Weel, man, we a' paired off, a woman of course to every man, and when we had a' got seated to a most elaborate set tea in the front parlour, I found mysel' between Mrs. Tamson—Andra Tamson's widow—and Mrs. Shanks, whae for three years and a half had owed me twal' and ninepence for settin' her kitchen range. Of course, bein' in society,

as it were, I made no reference to the accoont, and I passed the cookies, the cakes, scones, and jam to her as if she didna owe me a penny. Grizzy, I noticed, was sittin' beside John Todd, and certie they were well chummed, for they were baith Barjarg born, and in a jiffy their tongues were gaun like handbell' about the Keir and a' its affairs.

Dod, man, Mrs. Hairstanes did the thing weel, and the trouble and forethocht she must have had was by-ordinar. Mind you, it was a biggish company—fourteen in all—and her accommodation wasna what yin might ca' unlimited, but she had removed, for the time bein', the mair cumbersome plenishin's, and then she had placed the kitchen table end on end wi' the parlour yin, which allo'ed o' us sittin' wi' oor feet under one mahogany, as it were. I noticed, wi' my mason's e'e, that the parlour table was broader and stood higher by some three inches than its plain, weel-scrubbed freen frae the kitchen, but the table-cover was weel spread, and a vase o' wax flo'ers judiciously placed near the joinin' made the difference less noticeable to the

general e'en o' the company. My memory's beginnin' to fail me, and I'm sorry I canna gie ye a complete list o' a' the different eatables that adorned that table. This, however, I can tell ye—there was everything on it that could come from a Thornhill bakeboard, and to those wha ha'e sat through a towsy Thornhill tea my omission of the menu, as it were, will be o' very little importance.

If there was a previous dearth o' the "auld kirk," there was no scrimpin' o' the cup which cheers. Mrs. Hairstanes, puir body, was kept thrang, pourin' oot cupfu' after cupfu', so much so, indeed, that she never had a moment to lip her ain. I'm sufficeently weel mainnered to know that it's not the richt or proper thing to remark on what folk eat and drink, but dod, man, I must confess I was amazed and dumbfounded at the quantity o' tea that the company, especially the womenfolks, put oot o' sicht. Mrs. Tamson, puir auld body, beat a'. I dinna ken hoo often I passed her cup alang, but I judged it would be aboot the sixth time when I looket seriously into her face, and, said I, "Mrs. Tamson, dinna be angry

wi' me. I ken it's nane o' my business, and you'll maybe think I'm ower inquisitive, but would you mind tellin' me where you're gaun to put ony mair tea ? "

Man, she's a canty, couthie kind o' a body is Mrs. Tamson, for she juist lauched and tell't me that Andra when he was alive used often to ask her that very same question. That bit reference opened the door, as it were, to ither memories connected wi' her auld life-pairtner, and wi' ae thing and anither she began to greet and to tell me between her sobs hoo much she missed him, and what a guid, kind man he had aye been to her. This set Mrs. Shanks up, and she resurrected her faither—a guid-for-naething, drunken auld sowl he was, for I kenned him weel—wha deid ower at Gate-lawbrig sometime in the nineties, and tho' he had been a livin' sorrow to his folk a' his days, she grat for him as if he had been the holiest and kindest-hearted pilgram that ever clamb life's brae. When this kind o' sloppy wark was gaun on to richt and left o' me, as yin might say, Mrs. Hairstanes at the bottom o' the table was, as I say, thrang pourin' oot tea, and

between cups countin' up and namin' a' the folks wha had deid in the Auld Street since the beginning o' last year. Dod, man, it was soon a wailin' waefu' company, for wi' the tickin' off o' each name there was anither greetin' guest—Thornhill, ye ken, bein' sae sib and nearly related.

“Ay, it has been a tryin' time, and a thrang year o' deaths,” wailed Mrs. M'Girr as she spread a thick pat o' saut butter on a thin potato scone—“a sad, sad time, and the most o' them strong-lookin' and able-bodied—just like oorsels here. And who amongst us kens who's to be the next to be called hence? As the Psalmist says, ‘Our days are like the grass—flourishin' in the mornin' and cut doon at night,’” and then she took a bite o' buttered scone and chewed it with wonderfu' relish considerin' the kirkyairdy trend o' her meditations.

“Mirren M'Girr!” broke in her guidman, Jeems—a decent, quiet wee man, but of little gumption and less sentiment—“Mirren M'Girr, are ye no' ill-advised in eatin' tatie scones? Ye ken as weel as me that they lie cauld on the

stomach, and you're bothered at the best wi' a cauld in your innards."

If a look could knock a man doon Jeems M'Girr should have gone doon beneath that table like a ninepin. But he stood his grund and every yin was quiet and expectant. Dod, man, the silence continued till it becam' oppressive, and at last, to ease the situation, I looked doon to Mrs. Hairstanes and asked how her twae sons, James and John, were. Baith the boys were at that time wi' the 92nd Highlanders in South Africa—plucky, weel-daein' boys they were, and, man, she was prood o' their medals. For their sakes and that o' their profession she had a' the pictures in the parlour of soldierin' nature, as it were—the Battle o' Inkerman, the Thin Red Line, the Defence o' Rorke's Drift, and coloured prints o' a' the great generals we've read so much aboot. The only exception was the yin occupyin' the place of honour abune the fireplace—a print o' the Pope o' Rome—and after she had gien us the gist o' their last letter I, wi' my e'e on the Pope's portrait, said to her that yin wad almost tak' her for a Roman Catholic.

"How's that?" she asked.

"Oh," says I, "from the fact o' you havin' the picture o' the Pope abune your mantel-piece."

"That's no' the Pope," says she, wi' nae sma' birr and an inklin' o' displeasure.

"I'll assure you it is," says I. "Dan M'Vey, the Irish pavior, has yin exactly the same in his wee shanty doon the back road."

"Oh, Maister Doo, is that so?" she asked in alarm. "Megstie me, is that not awful? A gangrel body sell't it to me for sixteen shillings, and he swore to me it was General Gordon."

In less time than it tak's to tell, the Pope's face was turned to the wa', and as oor hostess was on her feet and as we had had a sufficiency o' tea and eatables we adjourned to the back parlour to engage in what Mrs. Hairstanes ca'd a little seasonable recreation.

Weel, man, as I say, ben we a' gaed to the back room, and there we sat, the womenfolk on ae side and the men on the ither, till oor hostess hersel' cam' ben.

Miss M'Bride, wha used to sing in the kirk

choir about ten years bygane, was proposed for the first sang, and after bein' flattered and coaxed for about ten minutes, she stood up and sang that auld mawkish sang "The Vacant Chair." In two minutes there were six greetin' mithers in that wee back room, and six snifterin' husbands tryin' to pacify them. Thinks I to mysel', "This is a cheery gatherin', a truly happy New Year's pairty," and I was just beginnin' to wonder where the fun cam' in, when I caught the tail o' oor host's e'e signin' me to the door. Visions o' a glass o' the Auld Kirk on the sly cam' to me, so I sidled cannily towards the door, on the excuse I wanted my hanky oot o' my top-coat pocket. In the lobby stood Wattie, wi' a face like a city missionary, and wi' a decanter in each haun.

"Robert," says he, "will ye gang roon wi' the ginger cordial and I'll tak' the lemonade?"

I looked at him for a moment up and doon, and then says I, "Are—are ye in earnest, Walter?"

"Yes," says he.

"Imphm—and you're feelin' your usual?"

"Yes," he repeated, surprised-like. "Am I lookin' ill?"

"Oh, Wattie man," says I, and I took him by the lapell o' his coat, "can ye no' see that it's neither ginger cordial or lemonade that's needfu' here?"

I waited for a moment, and the licht seemed to break in on him.

"Dod, Robert," says he, "you've wonderfu' penetration. I had clean forgotten a' aboot the kola. The wife got in six bottles for the occasion, forby a syphon—haud on a minute;" and he bolted into a back pantry. I didna wait his return, but rejoined the company, and sat doon as near to Grizzy as I could get.

After a service o' aerated waters, wee Jeems M'Girr cleared his throat and proposed me for a sang. Lang, lang ago I used to sing a passable sang, but I've been marriet a lang time noo and my haun's oot. I didna want to be stickin', though, so I stood up to my feet, pulled doon my waistcoat, straightened my tie, and said I was sorry I couldn't oblige them wi' a sang, but I would tell them a story.

Dod, man, that was a welcome innovation, for they all clappet their hands, and Wattie Hair-stanes kind o' forgot himsel'; for, says he, "That's richt, Robert, gie's a story—yin o' these . . . ye understand yoursel', Robert."

"No," says I, "I'll no' gie ye 'yin o' these . . . ye understand yoursel', Robert,' stories. I'll tell ye yin in keepin' wi' a sober, decent, weel-conducted company sic as we are in the noo. It's aboot a couple that gaed away on their honeymoon and they landed——"

"Robert," says Grizzy sternly, and wi' a face like a peony rose, "stop it."

"Stop what, Grizzy, my la's?" says I quite innocently.

"That story," says she.

"It's a' richt, Grizzy," says I; "it's the yin ye lauched at till ye took a stitch in your side."

"Robert Doo," she shrieked, "if you tell that story in this company I'll faint!"

Faith, that put the damper on me, I tell ye; so I juist contented mysel' wi' sayin' that I would tell the story to the men-folks by themselves, and they could, if they liked, tell their wives afterwards. Weel, after I had

been shut up—crushed doon juist like a concertina as it were, Mrs. Hairstanes says, “Mr. Watson, will you oblige us wi’ a sang?”

Sandie, no’ used bein’ ca’d “Maister,” didna juist catch on, but his wife touched him on the shooder, and on the request bein’ repeated he stood up, juist like twa yairds o’ pump water, and sang “The Wee Cock Sparrow.”

Sandie’s a great big man, wi’ a lood, deep-soondin’ voice—far ower big for a sang aboot a wee speug, but his singin’ o’t wad hae been a’ richt had he no’ ta’en a draw c’ his pipe at the end o’ every line, and spat in the fire at the end o’ every verse. As Miss M’Bride quietly remarked to me, it “wasn’t cultured.” But it did the turn and served the purpose, a’ the same.

Yin o’ the company o’ which I have made no mention so far was Mary Mackenzie, Robert Mackenzie the shoemaker’s wife. Her hair is white and her broo wrinkled, but I knew her when she was a snod, weel-faured lass, and I remembered she had a nice sweet voice, and sang the auld, lovin’, appealin’ Scots sangs in a way which made my hert sair and warm, and sent my thochts away back to the

sunny days o' lang ago. So, durin' a bit lull, says I, "Mrs. Mackenzie, I'm sure you havena forgotten how to sing yin o' the auld sangs. Will ye no' gie's a verse or twae?"

Of coorse she demurred, and, blushin' like a schule-girl, she said she had no voice noo, and couldna remember a sang to save her life; but after a little encouragement she stood up and sang "Hae ye mind o' Auld Lang Syne?"

I'm no judge o' music or musical performances, but, though her voice at times was trembling and uncertain, she brocht oot the true meanin' o' the words, and sang them wi' a sweetness and tenderness which fairly cairret me away. The careless, daffin' days o' boyhood cam' back to me—days "when the sun shone brichter far than he's ever done since syne," and I saw the auld Coo Road lined wi' fragrant hawthorn, and the noddin' gowans and the yellow buttercups fleekin' the bosom of its borderin' meadows. And then she touched on a time

"when the frosty winter cam',
When we sloyed along the curlers' rink,
And made their game a sham,"

and I felt the sharp sting o' the Nor'land wind in my face, and I saw the Lowthers wreathed in skinklin' snaw, and Rashbrigs Loch covered wi' a mirrorin' sheet o' strong black ice. And the ring o' the circlin' channel-stane, the wild halloo, and "the Duke's" cry, "Soop, boys, soop!" were in my ear, and I felt the pungent smell o' the swishin' coves and the aroma o' "the Duke's" Kendal Brown, which in his excitement he had flung to the nippin' frosty winds. And when in the last verse she asked,

"Where are a' these bricht herts noo,
That were since sae leal and true?"

I answered to mysel', "Gone! gone!" and, man, I turned my back to the company and made pretence o' examinin' a china dog on the mantelpiece. The wind ootside was changin' its airt. A puff o' smoke cam' doon the lum, completely envelopin' me, and when I turned roon Grizzy whispered to me, "Robert, there's a tear-drap on your cheek, here's my hanky." I said, "Thank ye, Grizzy lass; it's the smoke in my eyes . . ." But it wasna the smoke.

Then, in order to vary the proceedin's, Miss M'Bride proposed "Bible Guesses," and I tried to get behind the winda curtains; for I never, a' my life, was guid at guesses o' ony kind. A' the rest gathered roon, bringin' their chairs nearer, till they were amaiست touchin'. Then Miss M'Bride, puir lassie, sat in the centre, wi' her fingers twined together, and, in a kind o' a Sabbath-schule voice, asked, "Who in the Bible wore the biggest hat?"

After a lang silence, Wattie the prospective elder gravely intimated the fact that the Bible patriarchs didna wear hats; they wore turbans.

"Well," says Miss M'Bride, withoot geein' her beaver, "who in the Bible wore the biggest turban?"

"Oh," says Sandie Watson very promptly and wi' his chin in the air, "it wad be Samson likely."

Miss M'Bride said nothing—just looked at him up and doon in a pitying kind o' a way.

"No?" says Sandie inquiringly. "Imphm—well, it was—it was—tuts, his name's on my tongue-tip. Eh—Susan (this to his wife)—

what was the name o' the big hefty chiel that Dauvid the Psalmist killed wi' a wee chuckie stane ? ”

“ Goliath,” answered ten voices at once.

“ Wrong, all wrong,” said Miss M'Bride, as she straightened her back and pressed her lips together. “ What say you, Mr. M'Girr ? ”

Jeems, weel pleased at bein' singled oot, suggested wi' some assurance the name o' Bluebeard.

“ Bluebeard's not in the Bible,” said Miss M'Bride, wi' some heat.

“ I canna help that,” says Jeems. “ I had no haun——”

“ Tut, tut,” says Mrs. Hairstanes, “ we're gettin' oot o' order, I doubt; and when Miss M'Bride has gratified oor curiosity I'll read an extract I have here from a beautiful tract entitled ‘ New Year's Meditations. ’ Secular affairs have so far claimed oor attention—things of the earth earthy. It's no' by singin' sangs and giein' guesses that the strait gate is reached. Walter, put some coals on the fire.”

When Wattie was busy wi' the coal-scuttle

and the parlour shovel, I sidled ower beside Grizzy. "Oh, Robert," says she, "my feet are as cauld as lead, what say ye to gang hame?"

Dod, man, it was the wisest observe I had heard for a lang time, so after a good deal o' manœuvrin' we baith got beside Mrs. Hairstanes. Something was said about a letter that had to be written and posted before half-past nine, and a reference was made to poor Rettie wi' a fever-stricken hoosehold, and, after an earnest request frae me that oor waygoin' would not break up the company, and a "Guid-nicht a'," Grizzy and me ten minutes later found oorsel's ootside on the Auld Street.

We were baith terribly refreshed by the entertainment—for the time being—and strengthened and bolstered up for the future. I'm juist itchin', however, to meet Wattie Hairstanes in Penpont, and I'll bet ten shillin's to a thrippeny-bit that it'll no' be ginger cordial he'll drink, and, as sure as my name is Robert Doo, he'll pay for the roond.

CHAPTER XI

I HAD a wee bit job the ither week sortin' Maister Paterson's boiler, and after I had got everything in guid workin' order and was gatherin' my tools together, the guidman himsel' cam' daunerin' into the washin'-hoose, wi' a cigarette hangin' frae his lip, and says he, "Well, Maister Doo, have ye made everything a' richt?"

"Yes, sir," says I; "the trouble was, your boiler was ower laigh-set to start wi', but I've lowered the gutter o' the fire, and I'm safe to say ye'll hae nae mair bother wi't."

Well, man, we cracket on aboot ae thing and anither for quite a lang time, and I'll say this for him, though he be o' Sanquhar birth and a lawyer—twae devilish bad points against ony man—he's a most approachable, ceevil-spoken gentleman. Man, he took me a' ower his flo'er-hoose, where the bloom was by-ordinar', opened his forcin'-frames for my inspection,

showed me how, by a wonderfu' contrivance, the clothes-poles on the bleachin'-green worked in sockets, tell't me auld-farrant stories aboot his wee dog "Quharrie," and lots o' ither things forby; and before we pairted, says he, "Man, Maister Doo, oor Burns Club Supper comes off on Friday evenin', and I'll be glad to put your name doon for a ticket."

Dod, man, I must confess I was juist a wee bit taken aback, and I hung fire as it were. Never in a' my life had I been at a Burns Supper, and I had no intention o' gaun to yin, so after considerin' for a minute, I cleared my throat, and says I, "To tell ye the truth, Maister Paterson, I wasna thinkin' o't. I've been a great admirer and a constant reader o' Robert Burns since ever I mind, but I've never been to a Supper, and mair than that, I dinna consider I'm cut oot for that kind o' thing."

"Oh, but," says he, "you'll have to come to this yin. We'll a' sit doon together to a nice supper in the Buccleugh Hotel, and after that we'll have speeches and songs and recitations. And then, man, Joe'll be there."

"Joe?" says I,— "what Joe?"

"Oor Joe," says he, "and as you and he have been lang acquaint, he'll naturally expect to see you there. More than that, you're in a public way in Thornhill, doin' business on your ain accoont, and, apart from feelings o' patriotism, it's the least you can do to show your interest in our Club and back up our endeavours to keep his memory green."

"Weel, Maister Paterson," says I, "that's a' richt enough. I have the interest o' your Club at hert, and I wish your meetin' weel, but if I gang, certie it'll no' be to hear Joe, for I wadna believe a word he says. He has written and tell't some o' the biggest lees aboot Thornhill folk that ever I heard in a' my life, and if he's no' a straight descendant o' Ananias my name is no' Robert Doo. I'm hert-sorry for his puir faither and mither, 'at am I." Weel, man, we cracket on for a wee, and the upshot was that before much mair was said he took oot a wee note-book, and before I could say "Camplesacks," my name was doon, and the die was cast, as it were.

On my road hame, gaun through the Gill, I wondered to mysel' what Grizzy was likely

to think o' this ploy. Within my ain mind I was conscious o' the fact that I had been ower hasty, and that before decidin' I should hae got her breath on't; but then again, d'ye see, it had been suddenly sprung on me, and mair than that, I didna want Maister Paterson to think that I hadna the power to say "Yes" off my ain bat, as it were. A' the same, I kenned I had dune a daft thing and that I wad hae trouble, less or mair, wi' Grizzy ower the heid o't.

Did I ever tell you that Grizzy was—was—well, no' exactly contrary, but a wee bittie that way inclined? Man, it's yin o' her few faults, but it doesna signify much, as I ken hoo to work her. I havena been under the same roof wi' her for fifty years withoot kennin' hoo to crack the whip, so, after I had my tea, my boots off, and my slippered feet toastin' at the fire, says I, "I was through the Gill at Maister Paterson's a' day. It's the first job I've done for him, but he tells me it'll no' be the last. Imphm—he'll hae a lot o' work yonder by and by, and I think I'll hae a guid chance o't withoot an estimate, for he seems quite

ta'en on wi' me—cracket away as if he had kenned me a' my days, and, what d'ye think, Grizzy lass, he gaed the length o' invitin' me to the Burns Club Supper ! ”

“ Lovan, did he ? ” says Grizzy, quite interested. “ And what did ye say ? ”

“ Oh, what could I say ? I frankly tell't him,” says I, “ that I had never been in the way o' attendin' suppers, that in fact I wasna cut oot for that, and——”

“ Ach, Robert, ye shouldna belittle yoursel'. You're as like gaun to a supper as your neibors. You've baith claes and mainners, and ye ken as weel as me that it wad be weel wi' ye if your Bible was thoomed as your Burns is.”

“ That's true enough,” says I, as I slowly blew a mouthfu' o' pipe-reek away up to the ceilin'. “ I've baith the claes and the mainners, and I ken my Burns. Ye certainly put the maitter in a new and different licht ; but the fact is, I was, at first, very emphatic in my refusal, and—and—weel, Grizzy, I'm no' very sure about it, for it'll be no'eicht-to-ten sederunt, mind you ; it will likely be yin or twae o'clock i' the mornin' before they skail, and I wad be

miserable leavin' you a' your lane to that time. Is't in your mind, Grizzy, that he micht put his mason-work past me if I didna gang ? "

" Oh no," says she, " I dinna think that, but it's juist you and the like o' you who should attend a Burns Club Supper ; and as for leavin' me my lane, dinna bother yoursel' aboot that, for naeboddy 'll rin away wi' me at my time o' life."

Dod, man, she overruled me on every point, and, very reluctantly, in my way o't, I gave in ; everything was satisfactorily arranged, and I had carried my point, as it were, wi' honours.

Weel, man, when the 25th cam' roond, aboot half-past seeven I got mysel' dressed—dressed up to the nines, as yin micht say. I wore my dark blue coat wi' the black braid edgin', a dandy drab double-breisted waistcoat, which in the bygaun I may tell ye has been three times in the fashion since I got it, and of course my shepherd-tartan trousers wi' the black stripe doon the sides. Grizzy and me had a word or twae aboot my stairch. I must say I'm never comfortable wi' ocht stiff roon my neck or wrists, and she insisted on me wearin'

a dickie and a pair o' cuffs. I gave in to her; but dod, man, the dickie wadna stay doon, and the cuffs wadna stay up. Mair than that, the neck o' the collar stud wasna lang enough to grip baith the shirt and the dickie, and wi' me chugglin' and chugglin', the dashed thing cam' oot and gaed away doon the inside o' my semmit. I grip-grippet mysel' up and doon and doon and up, but I couldna locate it, and as I hadna anither yin, I had juist to tak' off a' my claes again; and then, when I was little expectin' it, it tumbled oot, and away it disappeared below the dresser. Doon I gaed on my knees, and I scartit a match, but that soon gaed oot, and Grizzy lichted a cannel. There was very sma' space between the floor and the bottom o' the dresser, and in order to see weel back I had to keep the licht near my face, and dod, man, I set my whiskers alunt and singed a' the side o' my face. Oh, man, I was mad; but I raxed away, and Grizzy got doon beside me wi' the tangs and a besom-shank, and juist when she was gettin' the stud oot bit by bit, the door opened, and Miss M'Bride cam' in for Grizzy's Foreign

Mission contribution. Gosh, when she saw me on my knees on the floor wi' nocht on but my—my—dod, man, she gaed oot o' the door like a blue-bucket flea. Grizzy lauched—man, she lauched till a rib o' her stays snapped, but I got up and on wi' my claes, and in a jiffy I was as respectable as need be. Respectable, did I say? I was mair; I was braw, and Grizzy juist remarked that she never saw me busket in the manner.

Weel, man, juist as I had shut my door and was clear o' the doorstep, Geordie Fingland's dog cam' doon the street, and no sooner did it clap e'e on me than it began to yelp and bark, and it followed at my heels till I reached the corner like a beast gaen gyte. Dod, thinks I, there's maybe something by-ordinar about me, something forbye lookin' which I dinna see, but which the dog sees, so back I goes to the hoose, and, says I, "Grizzy, am I a' richt, nocht wrang wi' my turnoot, back or front?"

She cast her eye on me, roon and roon, and up and doun. "No," says she, "there's nocht wrang so far as I can see. You're a

braw, wise-lookin' man," so I juist gied her a wee bit kiss, on the bygaun, as it were, and tell't her no' to flatter an auld man like me. I never let on about the dog followin' me yelpin' and barkin', for naebody likes attention o' that kind.

Away I went again, and in I goes to the Buccleugh Hotel juist as if it belanged to me, and after leavin' my hat and topcoat in a side room I was told to gang strecht up the stairs. Man, there was a carpet a' the way up, and I wipet my feet on every step, and when I got to the landin' where d'ye think I was ta'en ?—into the ballroom, sir. Dod, man, d'ye ken, the last time I was in that room was wher I was in the Duke's employ. I was fixin' a ventilator in the ceilin'—me and Billy Carruthers—and little did I then think, as I stood on the plank, that the time wad ever come when I wad be in that same room in a social capacity, as yin nicht say, dressed to the nines and hob-nobbin' w' the very best in the toon. Man, a queer, exultant kind o' feelin' cam' ower me, but I juist shut my eyes and asked the Lord to keep me humble.

Lovenanty, it was a great sicht. Every table had a white tablecover, and on the table in front o' every chair was a nice white hanky, folded in a by-ordinar fancy wee tourick. As for the flo'ers and the knives and the forks and the spoons, I've seen nothing like it except in a picture, and it juist struck me if the King himsel' cam' walkin' in he wad juist think he was in his ain Palace hame.

Among all the grandeur and the bright lights and the glory o't I must confess I was a wee bit nervous, and I wasna very sure where to gang or what to do wi' mysel', but, man, a' at aince I got my e'e on my auld freen, Adam Cringean, so I juist made a bee-line for him and sat doon beside him. Then the rest o' the gentlemen cam' in, some in swallow-tails, some in surtoos, ithers in ordinary jackets, a' maistly in black, however. Some, I observed, had by-ordinar lang dickies, nae tie to speak o', and very, very short waistcoats. I had often seen their marras in some pictures in Joseph Maxwell's tailor's shop, but I never had seen the like, in life as it were, till noo.

Weel, man, after

I loked a

blessin' in oor ain poet's weel-known rhyme, in cam' the broth. I had ta'en a very jimp tea on the strength o' a set-doon supper, and, truth to tell, I was as gleg in the appetite as a tod's whelp, but there were twae spoons, yin a wean's size, beside a wee fork at the top, and anither, full-sized as it were, at my richt haun beside a wheen different-sized knives, and as I wasna sure which yin to tak', and was anxious to do the richt thing, I juist hovered a blink. Thinks I to mysel', I'll watch and see which yin Adam tak's—he's used wi' siccan-like ploys amang the boolers, and whatever Adam does will be richt.

But Adam was hoverin' too. He eased the collar roon his neck, which wasna ticht, patted his tie doon when it wasna bulgin' oot, and then he took up his hanky and wipet his broo. I wipet my broo too. He hoasted and I hoasted. Then, to tak' the lead as it were, I raxed to his ear, and I whispers, "It's very warm, Adam." "It is warm, Robert," says he, and he took oot his watch to see what time o' nicht it was. After that we were baith quiet, and sat lookin' straight in front o' us,

wi' oor hauns aneath the tablecover. In a wee Adam made a kind o' a move, and I watched him tight wi' the tail o' my e'e, but, as I did sae, his e'e catthed mine. Dod, man, I felt guilty like, but to ease the situation I winked at him and he winked back to me, and says he, "This is a very dandy doonsettin', Robert." "A perfect bobby-dazzler, Adam," says I. Man, juist at that moment I chanced to look in the direction o' the Chairman and I noticed he was using a big spoon, so I lifted mine wi' a richt guid will, and says I, "Adam, the barley's up; there's little fear o' the broth burnin' oor mooth noo."

Weel, d'ye ken, after that everything gaed like clockwork. I never heeded Adam, juist kept my e'e on the Chairman, an' got through my haggis wi' a fork in my richt haun and a crust o' loaf bread in my left for what I wad ca' lavein' on purposes. I kind o' forgot mysel', however, when it cam' to the meat and potatties and got a nasty cut on my upper lip, but after a' that wasna to be wondered at as the knives were most infernally sharp and the glitter and the guid cheer and the

uncommon perfection o' the whole affair made my hauns shake most terribly.

The shiverin' jelly was in all colours, shapes, and sizes, and as for the dumplin'—eh, man, it was deecious. And the nits and the apples and the oranges—dod, I'll be honest and say I had seen nothing like it before, and it's very unlikely I'll ever see onything like it again.

Adam stood me a wee half when we were at the haggis, and not to be behin'haun I stood him a glass o' beer when we were eatin' the grapes, but I was very sorry after, that I didna do this when we were in hauns wi' the beef, as grapes and beer are not very get-onable.

Weel, man, after the gentlemen sittin' beside the Chairman had picked their teeth and folded up their hankies, Maister M'Kerlie proposed the toast o' the King and the Queen and a' the different members o' the faimily as it were, and the man at the piano played "God save the King," and we a' joined in singin' a verse o' that sang. Then my auld freen Joe was called on to propose "The Immortal Memory." Him and me are sib, and

we've had a lot to do together lately, so I maun be canny what I say. It's no' for me to criticise that speech, but I may say it was what I expected, and he expressed feelin's o' his ain, which were mine and every lover o' Burns the whole world o'er. Dod, man, when he was gettin' in his points the solemnity, the sacredness o' the whole thing cam' hame to me. I felt I was at a communion, that there was a livin', tho' unseen presence hoverin' aboot—ay, that the spirit o' Robbie himsel' was in oor midst, and that in appreciatin' the glorious heritage he has left to us we were a' o' one family—Burns brithers a'. We drank to his Immortal Memory in silence, but it was a silence which spoke to the hert what words could never convey.

Then we had the "Lea-rig," my favourite Burns sang, his purest, his sweetest, and his truest, and when it was being sung I was like to greet. Man, the happy days o' auld lang syne that I had spent wi' Grizzy away doon in the Barjarg fields a' cam' back to me. I shut my eyes, and I saw the silver birks in the simmer gloamin' licht, I listened aince mair

to the blackie's evenin' sang, and the gurglin' o' the Nith amang the saughs, and I lived a' ower again the joy o' her presence, the touch o' her haun on my airm, and the croonin' sweetness o' her voice in my ear. Dod, thinks I, Burns kenned it a', and when he sang o' love he sang for everybody—for Grizzy and me, sang o' the quietness, o' the happiness, the sweet content, the feelin' that the twae o' us were the only folk in the whole world, the joy o' each ither's company, the wee bit cuddle, and the warm fond kiss which told o' a rapture that lip-words could never, never express. Oh, boys! oh, boys! What a man! what a man!

After this we had a splendid recitation frae an honoured son o' Enterkinfit, whose hame has lang been in London, but whose hert has aye been in the valley o' the Nith. How he remembered every word withoot the book fairly astonished me, and the birr and life he put into the "Death of Montrose" made my fingers tingle to grip a sword and draw it in his cause.

At odd times, durin' the evenin', we changed

oor seats at the tables, and aboot half-past twelve I found mysel' sittin' beside Geordie Corson. Dod, man, he's a great warrior is Geordie. Him and me got on the subject o' slates, and cement, and cuttin' prices, and low estimates. Among ither things I tell't him I didna see the force o' takin' contract work at half naething, dependin' on the extras for a profit, and he clappet me on the shooder and tell't me I was "indeflippible." Faith, I said nocht to that, as I wasna sure what "indeflippible" meant; but, when I got hame, I looked it up in the dictionary, and couldna find sic a word in the whole book. I tell't him, hooever, before we partied, that if only he had had mair ambition, and the maitter o' three hunner pounds to tak' him through the college, he wad lang before noo hae been a Doctor o' Deevinity.

Weel, man, sangs followed speeches, and stories followed sangs, and when I looked my watch it was ten minutes to two o'clock, and, as sure as the cat's a beast, I had never ganted yince. I'm juist no' exactly sure what took place before we a' broke up, as the lime juice

I was drinkin' tasted not unlike "Johnnie Walker," and it made me by-ordinar interested in a story the farmer o' the Holm was tellin' aboot a stirk—he yince had that had three tails. I think it was three tails he said it had, but, really I couldna be sure for yin off or on, as I'm maybe confusin' this story wi' yin "Camplebrig" started, but didna finish, aboot a hen his sister had that had twae nebs. But I mind fine when I got hame I opened the door and walked in as quietly as cheetie-pussy, not to disturb Grizzy; but when I was hangin' up my topcoat, she cried frae ben the hoose, "Is that you, Robert?" "Ay," said I, "it's me. Whae were ye expectin'?"

Dod, man, she saw the point, and she sat up in her bed and lauched weel. I lichted the cannel, and when I was haein' a bla' o' the pipe I informed her o' what an extraordinar' affair I had been preveleged to be at, and hoo much I had enjoyed it. And when I gaed to my bed, half an 'oor later, I fell quietly asleep and dreamed, not o' suppers or speeches or ball-rooms, but o' a sweet-faced, jimp-waisted, red-

cheeket wee bit lass whae fifty years bygane
on the learig o' Barjarg tell't me her hert was
a' my very ain, and whae, in mirk and licht,
through sunshine and shadow, has been the best
and truest freen I'll ever hae on earth.

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